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SkyNET • HyperBlade

24 GAME REVIEWS

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- RAMA
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**STRATEGIES & TACTICS:**

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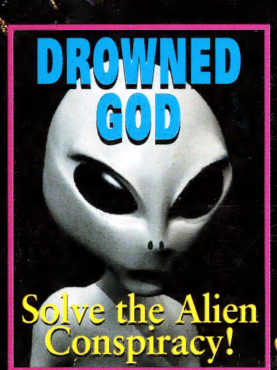


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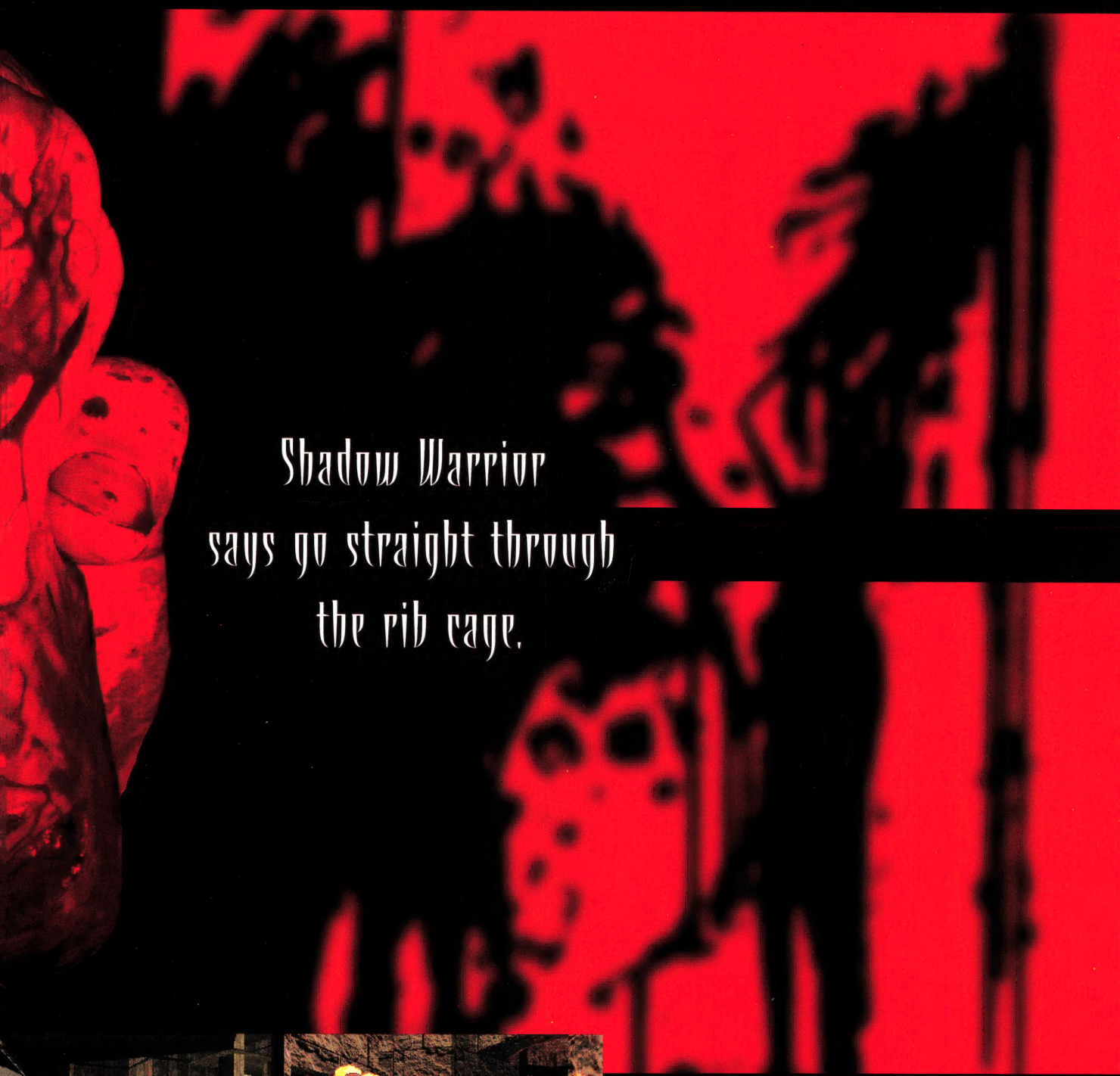

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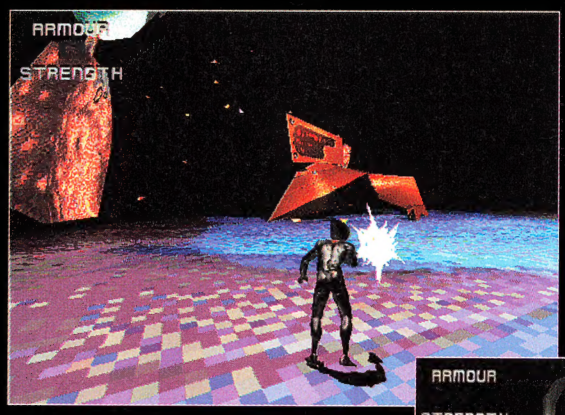

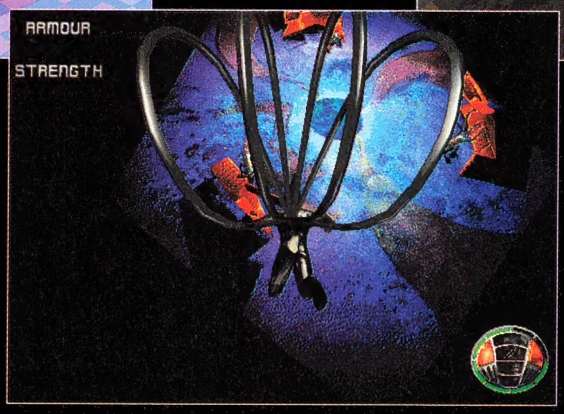


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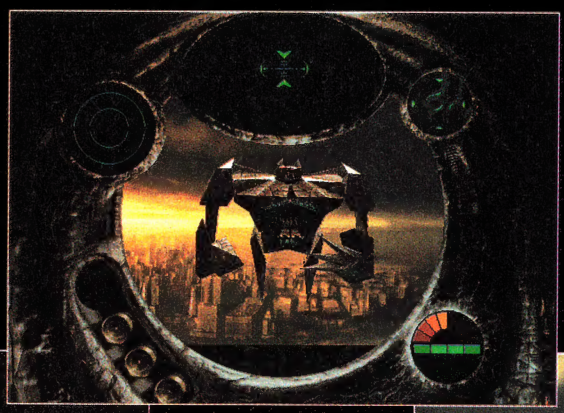

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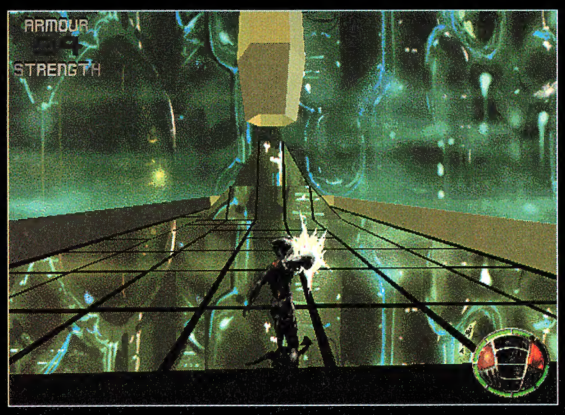

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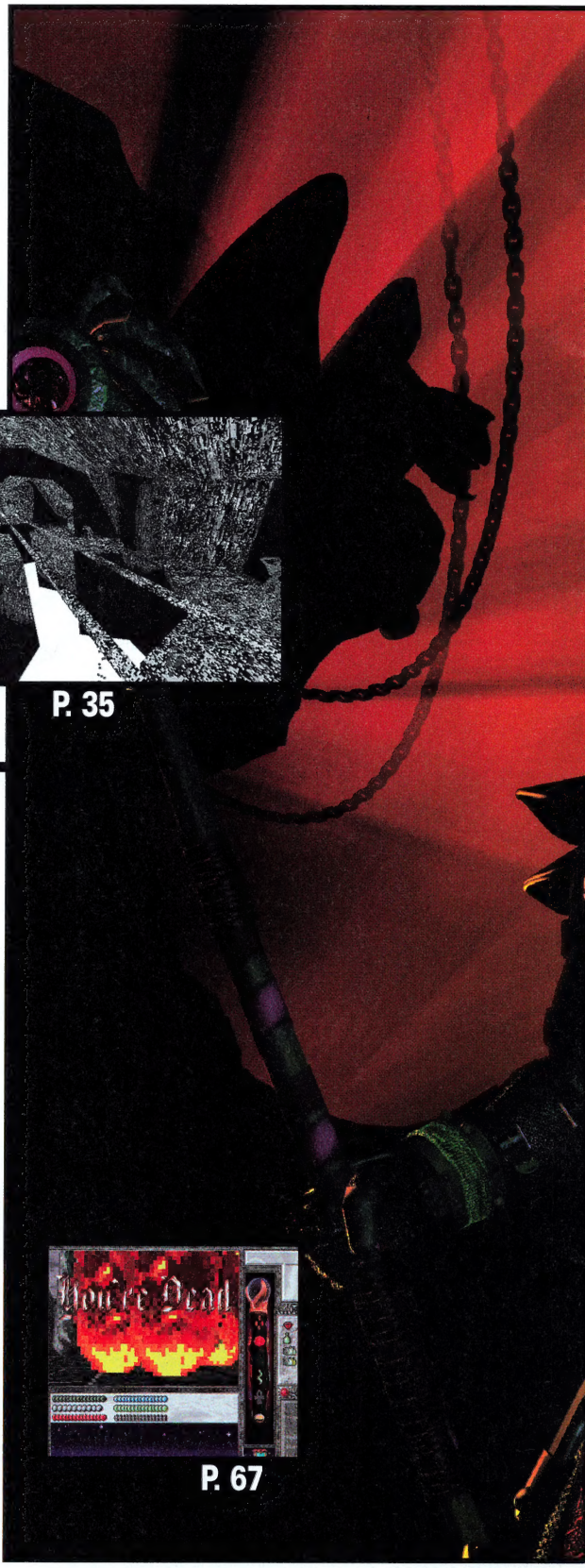

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- **The Drowned God: A Deeper Look**
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# EDITOR'S NOTE

STEVE KLETT

# Game Smorgasbord

We signed off on this issue in mid-December, the height of the Christmas shopping season. The *PC Games* staff was pitifully behind in fulfilling the gift list for its loved ones. Why? There were just too many outstanding games to play, including Command & Conquer: Red Alert, Tomb Raider, and SkyNET—all which you'll find reviewed in this issue.

The game that stole most of our attention and deprived us of the most sleep, however, was easily Blizzard's highly anticipated role-playing game, Diablo. Not only were we counted among the lucky 1,000 in the country to take part in Diablo's online beta test (250,000 people applied!), but *PC Games* went the extra mile to get a full, finished version of the game so that we could bring you the review first, which you'll find on page 40. Blizzard has been keeping a tight fist on the game, holding it back to tweak both various quests and its Internet gaming server, Battle.net. Was the wait worth it? You bet. No current RPG can match Diablo's depth, replayability quotient, and multiplayer appeal.

The sleeper of the issue has to be Eidos' Tomb Raider; it looked good when we previewed it, but we weren't sure the gameplay would be there. It is. This is easily one of the best action/adventure titles to come out on the PC, and if you've got an accelerator card (if you don't, this may be the game that makes you get one), it blows away its console competition for looks as well. We just couldn't help falling for its athletic, confident, and buxom heroine, Lara Croft. A few minor shortfalls, such as no multiplayer options, kept it just short of the *PC Games* A-List, but it's still an excellent game; there's a T-Rex scene that, in the gaming world at least, rivals anything you've seen in *Jurassic Park*. Don't miss Assistant Editor Daniel "Indy" Morris' dead-on review on page 48.

Of course, *PC Games* continues to offer you the most reviews of any print magazine first. We've got 24 in all, including the online RPG ArchMage from Virgin Interactive Entertainment, Activision's futuristic hockey game HyperBlade, SSI's Steel Panthers II, and that pathetic-yet-lovable moron Larry Laffer, who's back in the surprisingly good Leisure Suit Larry: Love for Sail.

For all you game designer wannabes out there, this issue of *PC Games* holds a special surprise: a guide to building Quake levels by none other than the Levelord himself, Richard Bailey Gray. If you remember, Richard designed many of the Duke levels for 3D Realms and wrote an excellent Duke level-building article for us in September. Now he's with Hipnotic Interactive working on a level add-on pack for Quake, and he's back in our magazine on page 35 to offer some guidance with your Quake construction efforts. The subject is much more complex this time around, so pay attention. You can also check out our Web site at **www.pcgames.com** for an expanded version of the story with links to some helpful Quake-editing sites.

So sit back with a cup of joe or another beverage of choice and dig in to one of the best issues of *PC Games* ever, as we help you decide on the best games to buy in the post-holiday shopping craze. We hope you enjoy the issue as much as we did bringing it to you!

Happy gaming!

Steve Klett

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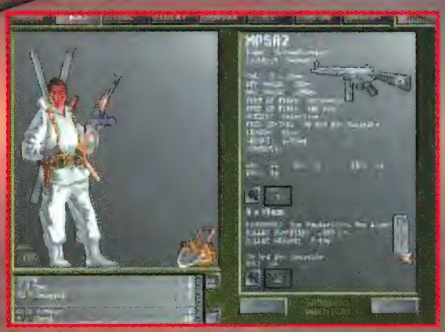

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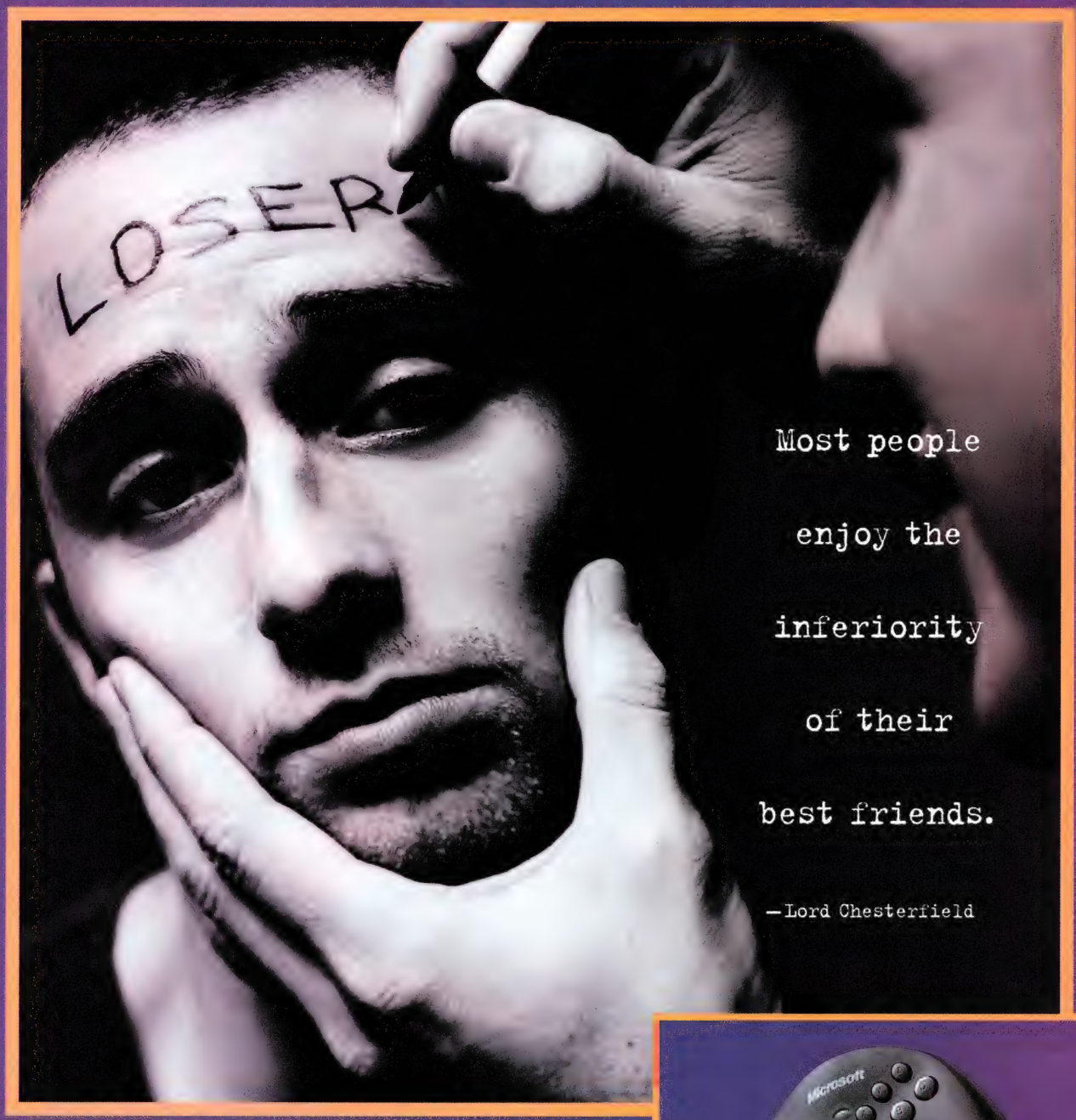


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# 25 HOT DEMOS

**Demo of the Month**
MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries (Activision)

**Action Games**
SkyNET (Bethesda Softworks)
Crusader: No Regret (Origin Systems)
ZPC (GT Interactive)

**Adventure Games**
Tomb Raider (Eidos Interactive)
Drowned God (Inscape)
Noir (Cyberdreams)
The Sacred Mirror of Kofun (Enteractive)

**Arcade Games**
CyberGladiators (Sierra On-Line)
Death Rally (GT Interactive)

**Fly & Drive Games**
NASCAR Racing 2 (Sierra On-Line)
IndyCar II (Sierra On-Line)
Power F1 (Eidos Interactive)
A-10 Cuba! (Activision)

**Role-Playing Games**
Diablo (Blizzard Entertainment)

**Sports Games**
Triple Play '97 (EA Sports)
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Lords of the Realm II (Sierra On-Line)
Star Command (GT Interactive)
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## Demo of the Month

# MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries

Activision

Climb inside a hefty mech and cast any notion of honor out the window; now, it's all about hard cash. MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries is the excellent follow-up to the groundbreaking MechWarrior 2. This fully playable demo shows just a hint of the detailed combat model that puts you in the driving seat of infinite armored mechs. Try it out for yourself.

## Getting Started

**Win 95**

1. Insert the disc in the CD-ROM drive.
2. Wait a few seconds and the disc will autoplay. If this fails to happen, use Windows Explorer to find the *pcgames.exe* file on the CD and double-click to run.

**Win 3.1**

1. Start Windows.
2. Insert the disc in the CD-ROM drive.
3. Select Run from the Program Manager's File menu.
4. Type "d:\setup.exe" in the Command Line box and press Enter.

## Getting Around

The opening screen offers a quick scan of all the great demos that have been lined up for this issue. Click on the arrow in the bottom right of the screen to "Take me to your Demos." There, you will be presented with the chance to install and play our Demo of the Month. All of the other demos can be accessed by scrolling through the following screens and clicking on any of the buttons to take you to install and play instructions for your chosen game. Couldn't be simpler.

## In Case of Emergency

The vagaries of PCs mean that you may occasionally run into difficulties. Here's how to access those demos manually if, for some reason, the interface fails to run: (Windows 95 machines) Open "My Computer." Right click on the *PC Games* CD logo and click "Open." All the game directories will be displayed. Double-click on the game you want to play and locate the *readme* file for that game. Double-click to open it and read the installation instructions.

Most games have a *setup.exe* or *install.exe* file that configures the game for your machine. Follow the instructions to get optimum performance, such as rebooting in MS-DOS mode to get the most out of the DOS-based games.

If you experience insurmountable difficulties, consult the help files at our Web site, **www.pcgames.com**. Should that not solve the problem, we can accept e-mail technical support questions addressed to ctou@pcgames.com.

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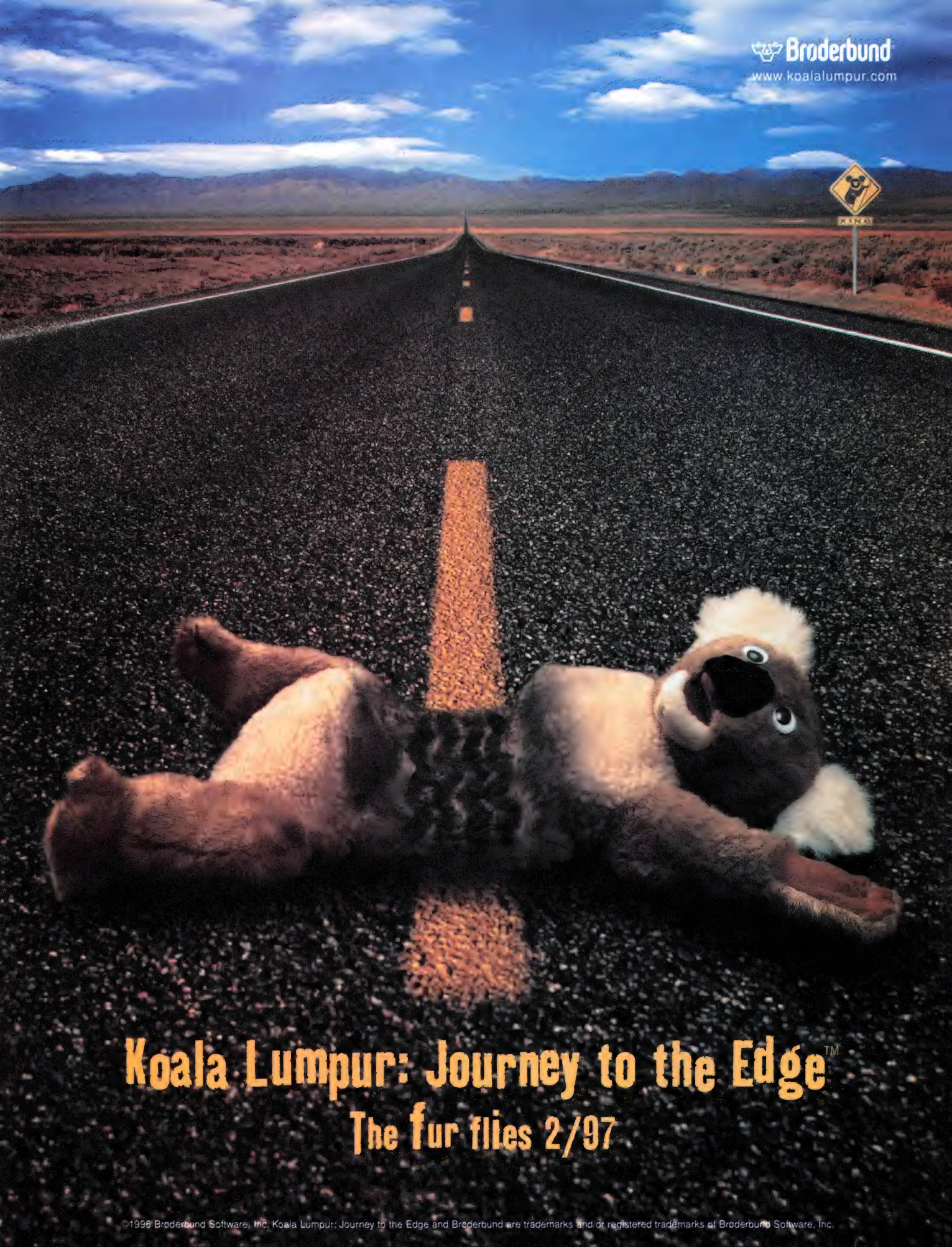


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The action is online these days, and that's where most of you are. We are, too—and online is where you can find breaking news, special features you won't see anywhere else, new shareware, and a world more. When you've read the magazine and played the disc demos, stop on by PC Games Online at **www.pcgames.com** and get the whole PC gaming experience!

Toy Story

## Quake Levels: Even More Tips!

Quake

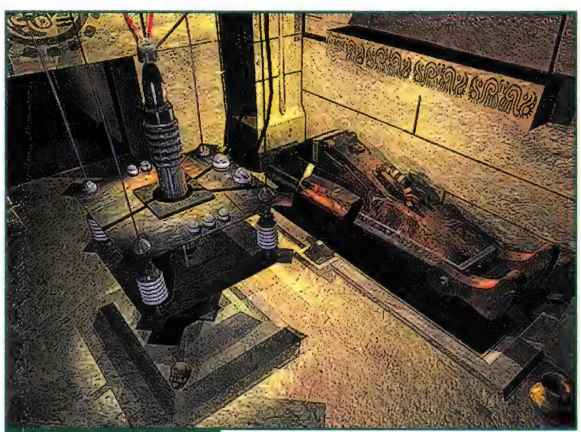
If you feel like you've mastered the official levels of Quake and The Levelord's piece on page 35 has whetted your appetite for building your own—well, you're in luck. We have an expanded version of his guide to making your own Quake levels, with hints and instructions exclusive to PC Games Online. Check it out at **www.pcgames.com/Quake**.

## Diablo: The First Review Anywhere

This month's exclusive, first-anywhere look at Blizzard's eagerly awaited Diablo isn't all we have to bring you on this groundbreaking RPG. Enter our Web site at **www.pcgames.com/Diablo** for even more views of the game and its huge batch of baddies, and click to our strategy guide for the first tips on getting through all the levels of hell and taking on Diablo himself.

## Expanded Reviews!

Christmas brings us so many games that we can't even squeeze them all in the magazine! So check out PC Games Online for Web-only reviews of such titles as The Sacred Mirror of Kofun, The Lords of Tantrazz, Toy Story, Deus Ex Machina, ZPC, and more! Just go to **www.pcgames.com/webreviews**.



The Drowned God

## The Drowned God: A Deeper Look

Inscape's The Drowned God: Conspiracy of the Ages has more story, environments, and sheer hours of gameplay than 95 percent of the games out there. Take a closer look at it with PC Games Online at **www.pcgames.com/drownedgod**. We'll guide you through the different places and link you to information about the many characters that populate this heady tale of alien intrigue.

# INCOMING!

## *Question of the Month:* License to Thrill?

Last year, we took a look at games based on movies. This month, we reviewed SkyNET, RAMA, and Toy Story, three more "tie-in" games. Now it's time for your opinion. What's the deal with games based on movies, books, TV, comics, and other media? Are they a good idea, or a shameless ripoff that exploits a popular license? Is there something game companies can do to make them work, or should they stick with original content? Once again, the best response will get a free *PC Games* T-shirt, and a free game, too. Write to us at Letters to the Editor, PC Games, 951 Mariner's Island Blvd., Suite 700, San Mateo, CA 94404; fax us at 415-349-7482; or e-mail us at pcgamesletters@pcgames.com. Please include your full name with each letter.

### RPG Me

It's been awhile since a decent role-playing game has come out, but Daggerfall and the upcoming Ultima IX and Ultima Online look promising. I was wondering what some other companies are producing as far as role-playing goes.

James Moore
Via the Internet

*Well, it looks like you're in luck, James. There's a whole slew of RPGs expected in the coming months, and with the success of Daggerfall, there's bound to be more. Last month, we reviewed Blood & Magic, which takes gamers into the heart of TSR's Forgotten Realms. We gave that game a C, but we liked Diablo and Nemesis: A Wizardry Adventure a bit more; see our reviews in this issue. We've got high hopes, too, for Realms of the Haunting, Descent to Undermountain, and Lands of Lore: Guardians of Destiny. Be here next month for our RPG roundup, where we'll preview these upcoming games and explore the future of the RPG. —Ed.*

### PC Games: The Road to Hell?

Dear "Player":

As I was reading every fully detailed and mind-absorbing page of your December issue, I was thinking, This is a damn good magazine despite some vulgar language. Well, since your publication uses it, I guess I will, too.

Like I said, your mag was just fine until I came upon YOUR inevitable page. What the hell were you thinking?! That letter about the mother wanting to cancel her 8-year old daughter's subscription because she thought the "repulsive, violent, and immoral" content in the mag was inappropriate for minds of any age was merely done for the protection of her child. I know your article was simply an editorial (or was it?), but why put down a mother caring for her innocent child?

Nick
Via the Internet

*The Player: Seems not everyone agrees with your sentiment, Nick...*

In response to the letter published in December 1996's Player column slamming your magazine: As far as I'm concerned, the person that wrote it can personally kiss my ass. I have been a faithful reader of *PC Games* for quite a while now, and look forward to your magazine each month in the mail. If the writer doesn't want her daughter to be exposed to the REAL world, don't let her read or watch TV. Your magazine kicks ass simply because it doesn't treat the audience like they're 5-year-olds. You express everything without holding back. KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!

Nathan Cook
Via the Internet

About that woman and her 8-year-old daughter: She must be a freakin' dumbass or something. This magazine is for the intelligent person, not someone who knows nothing about the gaming world. Give that wuss a copy of Duke 3D so she can understand the meaning of her words. "Repulsively graphic, violent, immoral, and thoroughly inappropriate for minds of any age." Damn fool—I love this magazine. Open your eyes!

Robert J.
Alameda, CA

I just read the December issue of *PC Games*, where an anonymous person "got on your back." I believe she is right. I salute this mother, as she shows that there is hope from evil in this species called humans. She is a parent, so it is her job to guard her children against the bad. Violent games such as Quake or Doom don't influence the minds of adolescent teens to adults, but they may and do corrupt children under the age of 13 or so.

Please give this anonymous mother some respect, because she is hope for this corrupted world, and you are obviously too barbaric to see it.

Name unavailable
Via the Internet

*Barraged by friend and foe alike, The Player responds: It was not my intent to chastise the aforementioned mother for caring for her child. It was, however, my intent to chastise her for putting the onus on* PC Games *for deciding what her daughter subscribes to. It's not our duty to parent other people's children, but rather to give the gaming world the information they want about today's kick-ass games, which more often than not include graphic violence and adult subject matter. Parents, if you think your children aren't mature enough to distinguish violence in games from reality, don't let them subscribe to the magazine, or don't leave it out for them to look at.* PC Games *is a magazine written by adults who are fanatics about computer games, for adults who are fanatics about computer games. It's not for 8-year-old boys or girls, which is why you'll never see the latest Barbie or G.I. Joe CD-ROM reviewed here.*

### Aww...

Remember that lonely gamer who wanted people to e-mail him? Could you put me on some list similar to his? PLEASE?!!!!!!!! PLEASE?!!!!!!!!!!!!

Victor Ramirez
pumkins@juno.com

*Nothing like a little desperate pleading, Victor—so here you go. And to all the people who've sent in similar requests, some good news: We've decided to make this a recurring feature. From now on, you'll find a list of readers seeking pen-pals in some Letters pages. Keep those requests coming, and we'll do our best to hook you up with other gamers.—Ed.*

### Whoops

December's Holiday Gift Guide had a few mistakes. The correct phone number for Masque Publishing is 800-765-4223. Also, we incorrectly attributed Star General to Blizzard and Starcraft to Acclaim; the correct publishers are SSI and Blizzard, respectively. We regret the errors.

### Gamers Seeking Gamers

Adam
thebomb10@juno.com

"Emil Me"
gambit47@juno.com

Jamie Krier
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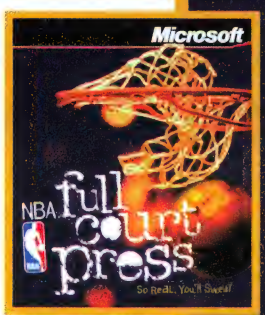

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# ANOTHER CRITICAL HIT!

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— PC GAMER

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— NUKE

"I bought it and no one has seen me since."
— GAME SPOT

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— PC MULTIMEDIA & ENTERTAINMENT

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— COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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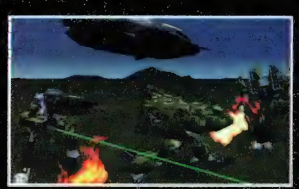

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# Riven Leads Game Slate at COMDEX

Expect more awe-inspiring visuals in Riven, the sequel to Myst.

It's official: The sequel to Myst has a name. Brøderbund's new CEO, Joe Durrett, revealed at last November's COMDEX convention in Las Vegas that the eagerly awaited follow-up will be titled **Riven** (pronounced like "rivets"), and will be released sometime this summer. That's great news for long-suffering Myst fans, who have waited four years for a follow-up to what is arguably the most popular multimedia title ever released.

Although interest by convention attendees was high, Durrett said Brøderbund decided not to show developer Cyan's work-to-date on Riven at this time. "We'd love to show people what Cyan has done so far, but we really don't want to tip our hand," he said. "The demand for this game won't be diminished a bit by not exhibiting it at COMDEX."

Heading up Brøderbund's game slate instead was **Tone Rebellion**, an alien strategy simulation from Ascendancy developers Logic Factory that's set to debut this spring. Features include 360-degree 3D detail, four alien races to command, and 15 environments to rebuild while pitted against a crafty enemy.

MMX-driven Pod drew a crowd at COMDEX.

The second strategy game in the dome was **WarBreeds**, an imaginative take-off of Warcraft featuring genetically enhanced war beasts that do battle in the place of tanks, planes, or mechs. Brøderbund says the game will arrive this fall with easy-to-manage resources, multiplayer options, and maps twice the size of Warcraft's.

The **Last Express** is an international intrigue adventure set on the Orient Express in 1914 Europe. Developed by Prince of Persia designer Jordon Mechner, the game combines 3D-rendered environments and rotoscoped animation of live actors rather than jarring live-action sequences. All three titles will ship as Windows 95/Macintosh hybrids.

Although Brøderbund was the most visible game publisher at COMDEX, Ubi Soft, 7th Level, and other gamemakers exhibited as well.

Ubi Soft's smaller booth drew continuous crowds to see and play the futuristic racing game **Pod**, which will most likely be the first MMX-compatible game out when it hits hardware bundles in January and stores by April.

Pod looked good and played smoothly as attendees crowded in to catch a glimpse of the MMX-only visual effects. Apparently, engine exhaust flares and skid marks go a long way toward acceptance of games.

Ubi Soft is claiming that the game's ISP-to-ISP online performance will show fewer latency problems than competing games such as MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries, but wouldn't elaborate on specifics. Its staffers also promise extensive Web support for Pod, as well as online multiplayer matches. Expect Ubi Soft to spend more than $1 million on print advertising to supplement Intel's television MMX campaign.

Tucked out of the way was 7th Level's booth. New on the publisher's list of games is **HeliCops**, a surprisingly entertaining combat helicopter simulation set in an indistinct future.

Developed in the United States with animation drawn in Japan, HeliCops sports a fluid Speed Racer look. But looks can be misleading: This is also a well-executed air combat shooter that would have made a great arcade Virtua Copter had Sega done it.

Players will get to choose from five different pilots and five separate attack choppers when the game is released in June. Flight controls have been dialed to ease of use rather than reality, and HeliCops will support eight network players or four via the Internet. A four-mission, full-option shareware demo is available now.

7th Level also confirmed that its 3D mechanized combat entry, **G-Nome**, should already be in stores now, but computer gamers will not see the real-time strategy spin-off Dominion until sometime between January and March.

The version of Dominion that 7th Level demonstrated at COMDEX lacked its artificial intelligence (AI) features; however, the mech milieu, unique alien designs, ease of management, and map editor mean this game may have what it takes to rise above the increasingly crowded strategy simulation genre.

As for G-Nome, the AI was operating, offering a glimpse at some potentially kick-ass first-person mech gameplay. In this case, a superior computer opponent turned and ran from battle—long enough to lead the 7th Level human driver into a pack of unfriendlies. The human lost.

*—George T. Chronis*

# LucasArts Goes Strategic

Rebellion should please MOO and Ascendancy fans.

Star Wars, indeed. LucasArts has unveiled its newly announced strategy game Rebellion, which is set for release next month and will mark the company's first foray into the genre.

And what an ambitious foray it is. Rather than going after the real-time Command & Conquer market, as had been reported, Lucas is instead eyeing the much more demanding strategy niche that's dominated by games such as Ascendancy and Master Of Orion.

Players will square off against either the computer or a friend via modem and LAN; Internet play options are also being considered. The stakes? Domination of a 200-planet galaxy set in the *Star Wars* universe. The game will happen in real time, meaning that players make moves simultaneously, and it'll offer a tactical combat option that will enable you to watch and direct ship-to-ship conflicts. But the game's emphasis is definitely on strategic thinking, planning, and resource management, not twitch-based combat skills.

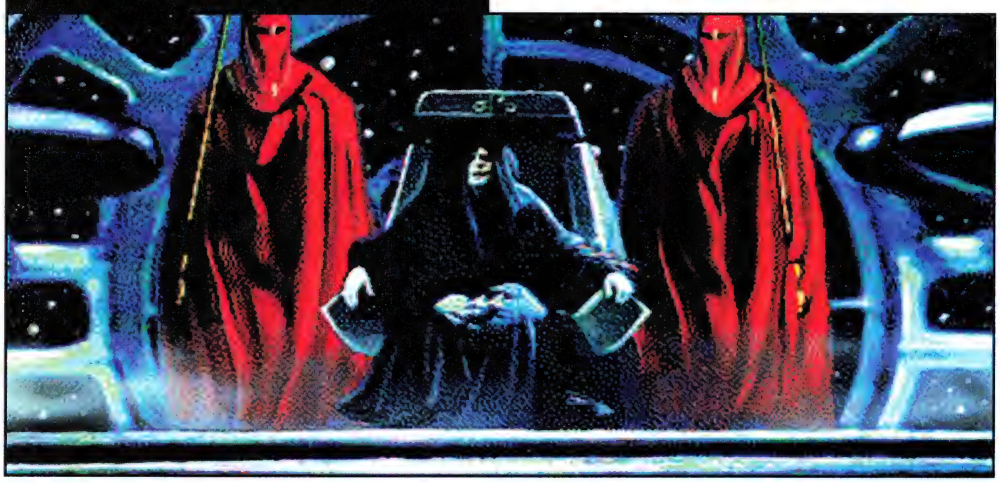
To win, you will have to build a strong alliance of planets, which will ultimately translate into control of the galaxy. You can win a planet's loyalty through military means (parking a Death Star nearby, for example) or diplomacy.

The game takes place following Luke's mastering of the force to destroy the Death Star, and the Empire is intent on revenge. You'll be able to play as either the Empire or the Rebels, and your goals will vary accordingly. As the Empire, you will have to do one or all of the following, depending on the game you choose: capture Luke Skywalker, snatch Rebel leader Mon Mothma, or destroy the Rebel headquarters. Play the Rebels, and you'll need to capture Darth Vader or Emperor Palpatine, or destroy the Empire headquarters at Coruscant.

As you can see, the game will be character-driven. Most of the main characters from the movies will play a role, acting just as you'd expect. For instance, if Princess Leia is captured and you don't act quickly enough to save her, Luke may go off on his own for a while to bring her back—and may be captured himself in the process.

Lucas and developer Coolhand Interactive are trying to balance the gameplay to attract both hardcore strategy fanatics and new players—not an easy task. So far, the results look promising indeed. —*Steve Klett*

Fight for the Emperor or vanquish the Emperor—the choice is yours.



## GAME BYTES

### California ISP Teams With Simon & Schuster

The EarthLink Network, an ISP that already has strong ties to developers such as Activision and Graphix Zone, has just inked a deal with Simon & Schuster Interactive. The agreement will put EarthLink's registration software on the next seven releases from Simon & Schuster and Byron Preiss, including Star Trek: Borg.

### GT Acquires Warner's European Division

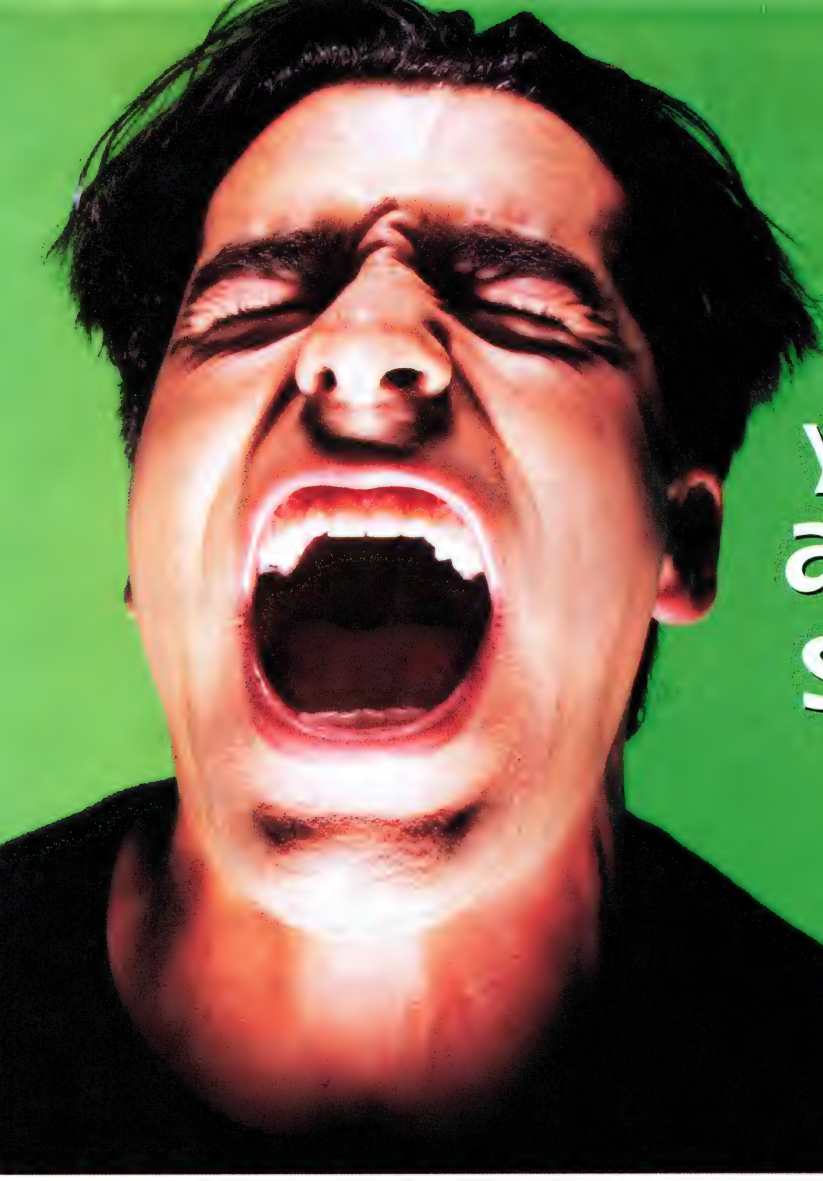
GT Interactive's voracious appetite for acquisitions continues, with Warner Interactive Entertainment Europe as the latest item on the menu. The cash transaction gives GT access to Warner's 70 employees in France, Germany, and Australia, plus "certain" rights to such titles as Virgin's Z (the PlayStation version) and Warner's Pitball.

### Sega to Release DVD-ROM in Japan

The *Nikkei English News* reports that Sega Enterprises intends to be one of the first gamemakers to embrace computer DVD-ROM drives early next year in Japan. The publication said Sega plans to release four games on one DVD-ROM, including a new version of Virtua Fighter. If true, a U.S. release probably wouldn't be far behind.

### Online Households to Grow to 38 Million by 2000

Research firm Jupiter Communications estimates that the number of North American households with online access will more than double to 38.2 million by the year 2000.



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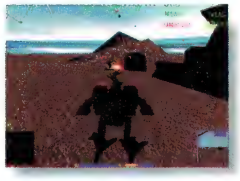

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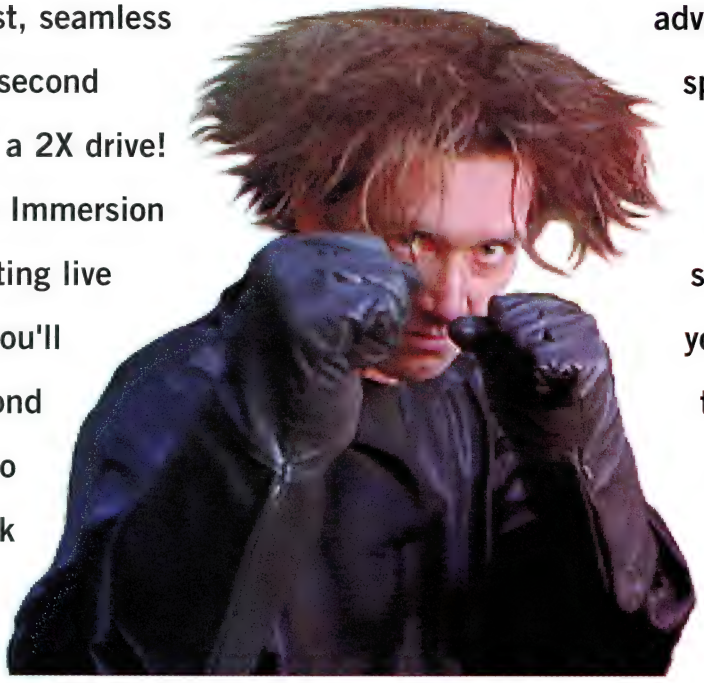

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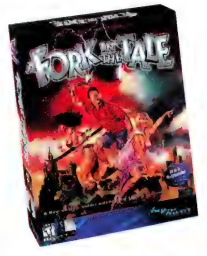


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# Video Games Bash CD-ROMs, but Duke Stands Tall

Despite a two-year sales slump in which consumers put off embracing 32-bit and 64-bit console systems and computer gaming gained a foothold, video games have come roaring back to their old 16-bit popularity, according to the NPD Group, a market research firm.

NPD, which compiles sales data from retailers, says that for the first nine months of 1996, 16 of the 25 best-selling games were console platform titles.

While there aren't as many hot CD-ROM games as hot console titles, the good news for computer gamers is that their champions sell as many or more units individually.

True, Nintendo's Donkey Kong Country 2 for Super Nintendo was the No. 1 best-selling game, but Nos. 2 and 3 were Duke Nukem 3D and Warcraft II, followed by Super Mario 64, says NPD vice president Ed Roth.

"Video games are making a comeback, but you have to take into account two variables that contribute to more console games making it onto the top-25 list," Roth says. "Unlike CD-ROM games, video-game sales begin peaking as we enter the fourth quarter and the holidays. Also, computer games show a more rapid decline in sales after four to five months. Video games have longer legs."

*—George T. Chronis*

**The Nintendo 64 has helped ignite console-game sales.**

## The I-Magic Strategy

Interactive Magic, "Wild Bill" Stealey's North Carolina–based sim factory, isn't resting on Harpoon Classic '97. The company, best known for its flight sims, hopes that two upcoming strategy games will land it squarely on the wargaming map.

**Fallen Haven,** a futuristic space-combat game, pits Earth scientists on the colonized planet of New Haven against a race of evil aliens, the Taurans (attracted by a peaceful human space probe—D'oh!). Players assume command of either the humans or Taurans as they build structures, do technological research, and send forces into combat in either grand strategic or ground-zero tactical modes of gameplay.

**Fallen Haven launches I-Magic into space-conquest gaming.**

**Battles of Alexander the Great** opts for the opposite end of the historical spectrum, offering a wargame based on the exploits of Europe's greatest military conqueror. From Greece to Asia to Africa, there's a lot of land to be annexed before you can join Alexander and weep with no more worlds to win. Battles is heavy on historical authenticity, with meticulous attention paid to the uniforms, weapons, and troops of the era.

Both games are scheduled to ship in March. (Interactive Magic; 800-789-1534; www.imagic games.com) *—Daniel Morris*


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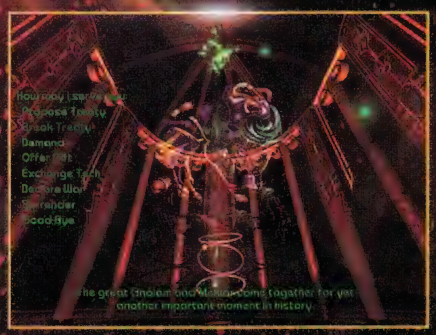

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## SSI Readies Blitzkrieg

SSI has laid out its plans for the coming year, with some familiar faces on the calendar and a few strangers thrown into the mix as well.

First up is a Civ II–type strategy game called **Imperialism**, which is due to hit stores this May for both Windows 95 and Macintosh. Your goal, of course, is to grow your country into a dominating world power by brute force, diplomacy, or both. Technology spans the industrial revolution to the first tanks, and will evolve as your country matures. Clever manipulation of economic, military, and diplomatic resources will be the key to defeating the opposing seven major world powers and 16 minor powers. Modem support will allow for head-to-head play.

**Panzer General II will feature bigger game maps and much more detailed units and terrain.**

Next out of the gate is SSI's newest addition to its Five-Star General series—**Pacific General**, which pits the United States against Japan circa World War II. You can play as either side, but if you play as Japan, your goal is to take over North America—and you may find a surprise midway across the country in the form of the German army. Panzer General veterans can look forward to bigger game maps to play on, updated art, and a crisp, updated interface. A Battle Generator is included to help you create your own scenarios in Europe, Africa, America, and Asia.

Other products include **Panzer General II** and **Soldiers At War**, an X-COM-like strategy game set in WWII; both are scheduled for October release. Also slated for October is an action-oriented 3D pirate simulation called **Ship Of The Line**, with **War Wind II** and **Steel Panthers III** set for November or December. And things look good: Early peeks at Panzer General II, Pacific General, Soldiers At War, and Imperialism had us chomping at the bit to play them.

*—Steve Klett*

## DVD Finally a Reality

Rising out of vaporware status, DVD-ROM drives with 1.3MB-per-second transfer rates should now be available after months of delay due to lingering intellectual copyright issues that have hounded the high-density storage system.

"We really wanted to be first to market with a DVD-ROM drive," says Panasonic product manager Douglas Feldner. "We're releasing an enhanced IDE kit, including an MPEG 2 board, for under $1,000." Feldner says Panasonic is still negotiating with game publishers, but don't be surprised if a DVD-ROM game bundle is included in the package.

Panasonic's main target in the DVD release race is Toshiba, which has garnered most of the press attention where DVD-ROM hardware is concerned.

Toshiba also exhibited its DVD-ROM drive at COMDEX and expected to release the unit in January as well. The manufacturer says adding a DVD-ROM drive to a computer system should increase the retail price between $400 and $500.

Goldstar CD-ROM product manager Gregory Ryan says his division will likely offer complete DVD systems, as well as bundled models, by next spring. Later in the year, he says, the company will also produce a model with a 2.7MB transfer rate.

Over at Sony, Kazuhiro Watanabe, a staffer at the DVD Business Center, says his company's DVD systems have not yet been announced, despite a working demonstration model on display in the booth. "Whether we will produce a full DVD computer system, DVD-ROM kits, or specific OEM products has not been decided," he says.

*—George T. Chronis*

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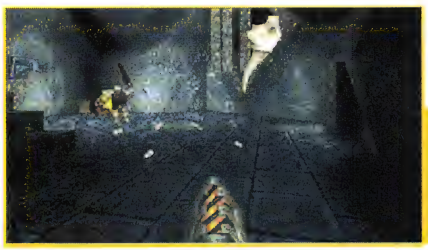
# Quake Expands—Officially

id Software has announced two new 15-level add-on packs for Quake. Scourge of Armagon developed by Hipnotic Interactive, features two new enemies—the small, vicious Gremlins and the armor-plated scorpion Scourge—and two new weapons: Mjolnir, the electrically charged hammer of Thor, and the Laser Cannon.

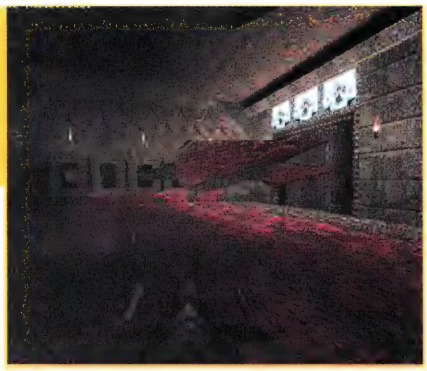


**Look out! Dissolution's multi-grenades will be deadly.**

New power-ups include a rubber suit offering protection from electricity, a Horn of Conjuring to bring a random monster to your aid, proximity bombs that stick to surfaces and explode when someone approaches, and an Empathy Shield that splits damage inflicted between you and your attacker. Along with a bunch of nasty new traps and tricks, the whole thing culminates in a battle against the cyborg Armagon.

Meanwhile, Rogue Entertainment's The Dissolution of Eternity add-on includes, finally, the Dragon as a powerful end boss. (He was originally intended for Quake, but dropped due to time constraints.) Other new enemies include the Overlord—a floating, robed, skeletal figure—the Wrath (the Overlord's minions), and Electric Eels.

**You'll have new traps to avoid in Hipnotic's Quake pack.**



Four weapons have been added to combat these nasties: Lava Nails are powerful new ammo for the nailgun, multi-grenades split into eight pieces when fired for a greater blast radius, multi-rockets divide into four to target multiple enemies, and the lightning gun is beefed up to fire a bolt of high-energy plasma.

At press time, exact release dates were unavailable, but both of them should be out by March.

*—Rob Smith*

## Jack Goes Live

Berkeley Systems' YOU DON'T KNOW JACK, once merely a wacky game-show CD, has charmed itself into becoming the main attraction on the publisher's new online entertainment network, beZerk.

The move to the Web at **www.bezerk.com** helps Berkeley, which can't seem to get enough additional Jack question sets onto CD-ROMs fast enough, as well as Jack fanatics, who can now indulge themselves 24 hours a day and earn cash prizes for playing.

Players on the YOU DON'T KNOW JACK Netshow can win $100 a day if they're the high scorer. Grand prizes of $5,000 have also been awarded to Jack-proficient participants with the highest cumulative scores over a particular month.

Can't wait to play? Go to **www.download.com** and download the engine.

Be warned, though: Unless you're running Windows 95, Jack will thumb his nose at you for now. Berkeley promises a Macintosh Netshow engine sometime soon. That's right—no Win 3.1 support.

*—George T. Chronis*

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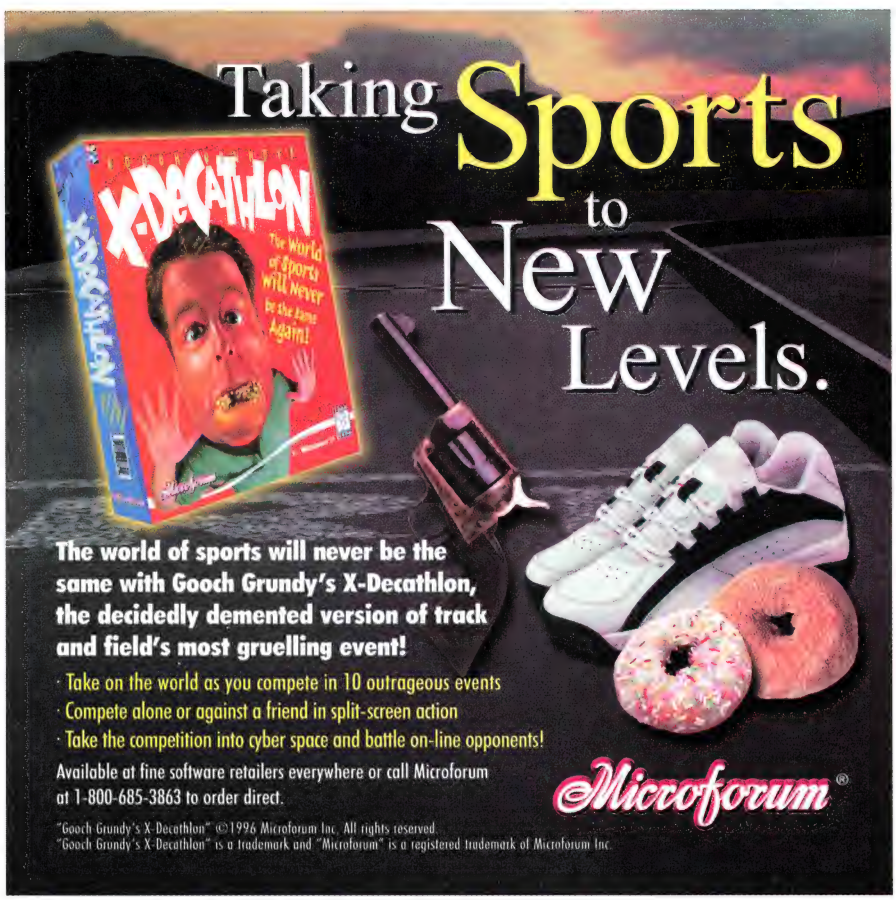
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# THE PLAYER

STEVE KLETT

# Bug Off!

Bugs, bugs, bugs. They're everywhere these days. The Player can't seem to load a game onto his computer without some creepy-crawly offending bit of code showing itself in short order.

Worse still, these software infestations seem to be viewed by the industry responsible as an acceptable business practice. As one of The Player's Duke pigeons is fond of saying after he's been beaten 100 to 1, "That's just wrong."

The now-normal method of shipping a game out the door, followed in a week or two—if customers are lucky—by a patch fixing several programming errors or errors of omission (known as "bugs" to those responsible), is akin to a landlord giving you a can of Raid once you've signed the lease on a new apartment that's been advertised in "perfect" condition.

For example, let's look at Take 2 Interactive's recent premature release of the highly anticipated Battlecruiser 3000 AD, which you'll find justly reviewed in this issue. This game crashes when you install it, crashes when you do any number of things within the game—if you can get it to run, that is—and will even crash when you just look at it. On top of that, the manual is a joke, which, given the game's sophistication, is unacceptable. In short, the game out-shames even Sierra's Outpost in the bug department, which is no small accomplishment.

It's obvious this game was rushed out the door to take advantage of the Christmas season. Then again, maybe "rushed out the door" isn't exactly accurate since the game has been in production for about seven to eight years. Take 2 simply appears to have gotten fed up with waiting for its completion, deciding to get it on the market and banking on the fact that it would have patches ready in short order to quell the rash of complaints anticipated. Take 2 should recall the product, finish it properly, and do a Battlecruiser release take-two.

This happens all the time, and Take 2 is by no means the only offender; Battlecruiser is just so sloppy that The Player felt an obligation to rake everyone involved with its release over the coals.

Other "buggy" recent releases include The Rise & Rule of Ancient Empires (bad AI), MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries (a few fatal mission bugs), and Solid Ice Hockey (AI), just to name a few. The odds are, if you visit the Web site of any company that's just released a game, you'll find a patch—sometimes an abundance of patches.

At least this shows the companies involved recognize the problems with their games and take the time to fix them. But it shouldn't have to be the responsibility of gamers to hunt down patches to make their $50 purchases work properly. Game companies simply shouldn't release their games until they are done. Sure, The Player will forgive the odd configuration bug or two, as will most gamers. But being the unreasonable sort he is,

The Player does expect his games to install and run, and have things like fully implemented AI included when they ship.

The Player would like to know why bugs are acceptable in the games industry, more so than any other industry. Bugs do happen all the time with products of all types. For instance, he just received a recall notice on his car's faulty seatbelt clips—talk about a possibly fatal error! He's also received recall notices for his television and toaster, warning of potential manufacturing defects. However, he has yet to buy a car that fails to start, or is missing an engine or driver's manual—and that happens all the time in the software world.

Meanwhile, game companies continue to scratch their heads in bewilderment, wondering why the PC hasn't taken to the mass market gaming crowd as quickly as anticipated. The Player doesn't think he's going out on a limb by saying a large reason for this is bugs. Joe Consumer expects things to work when he buys them; he doesn't want to spend his precious leisure time fooling with configuration files or searching the Web for patches and then installing them.

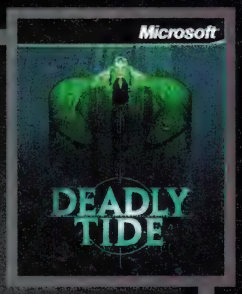
For some reason, game consoles don't seem to have the same degree of roach infestations as their PC cousins. Most console games work right out of the box with little trouble at all. Sure, many have niggling little bugs, but rarely do they detract from a game's enjoyment. Of course, console games are a little easier to design, as there are stable specs to program for, but the PC industry as a whole can certainly do a better job. And it'd better, if the PC is going to capture the mind—and wallet—share of Joe Consumer any time soon.

Shame on you, Take 2.

*As always, send your comments, criticisms, jokes, bug repellant, and Duke challenges to ThePlayer@pcgames.com.*

ILLUSTRATION BY STEVEN W. FLEURY

Microsoft
Where do you want to go today?

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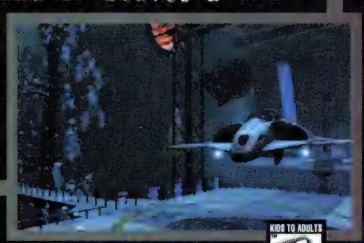

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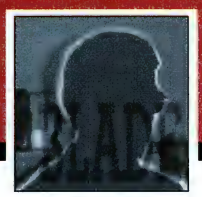
# THE OPPONENT



BLADE

# Come Out and Fight Like a Man

Wimps. Pansies. Irritating little rodents. That's what they are, the lot of them.

What is The Opponent ranting about now?

Damn snipers, that's what. In the online world where Quake deathmatches and Dukematches are fought, there are players bringing the action game into disrepute. Their interests are removed from the whole concept of first-person action games. They're the sniveling wretches who, on a winter day, would hide behind walls, spring out with a barrage of snowballs, and then peg them into the distance, giggling like schoolgirls.

Miserable creatures. They destroy the spirit of the contest, pillaging the very essence of what real gamers, real *deathmatchers,* want to go online for.

Quake's versatility allows players to hide in cubbyholes and zoom their views to a certain location. A dark recess, preferably high up, with a pack full of rockets and the launcher to fire them (always comes in handy, that), and the dull, boring sniper has a field day as honest combatants duke it out, pitting their sure-footedness and lightning reactions against the best in mortal combat.

The Opponent wants to know one thing: What's the fun in that? More importantly, what's the point? He doesn't spend hours on Quake servers to sit idly, waiting for rocket fodder to have the misfortune to wander by. How is that pitting his skills against the rest? It isn't. It's just a test of how uninventive some players can be.

Okay, so the real fighters die more often. Is that a crime? In any of the current first-person shooters, is that fact held against them when the final tallies are totted up? No.

So here comes the issue: What methods and scoring systems can—and should—developers like id and 3D Realms implement to ensure that good play is rewarded?

Quake's standard kill count is the most basic of them all, and suffices for the genuine fighters. Duke Nukem's system is more complete: While the end column of number of kills is still the crucial issue, there's room for argument in the chat rooms if player X has died Y times more than player Z.

And who's to decide what method should prevail? Despite the fact that snipers are abhorred the online world over for their sad attempts to stay in the race, there are plenty of them out there. There are people on TEN who actually think it's fun to sit by a respawn area, crouched like the cowards they are in a corner, and fire rockets into unsuspecting victims as they appear. Cretins.

During the development of the forthcoming Shadow Warrior, 3D Realms has pondered these issues to try to create a method that would be fair to all players on a level playing field. The system that appears in the final shipping version should be interesting: Once you start rewarding certain actions, where does it stop, and how difficult does it become to track the exact actions of numerous players?

3D Realms is toying with the idea of inflicting gradual damage after a certain amount of time on characters who've stood still or lurked in one area beyond the time necessary to collect any items and then move off to find the action. In addition, more difficult kills may be rewarded. Duke Nukem's auto-aiming takes away much of the keen aim required in Quake, but then again, a pistol kill is surely worth more than an RPG death. If a mighty boot frag counted as 10, for example, a whole new aspect of deathmatching could open up.

Because the Build engine is far less flexible than Quake's, online gamers are going to have to stick with whatever final decisions are made by the 3D Realms crew. But Quake players can already download patches that track scores in the same manner as Duke Nukem, and other scoring methods appear at regular intervals.

So what does this mean for John Carmack's Quakeworld as it becomes a reality? Carmack is aiming for a truly global concept whereby the best Quake players in the world could be judged on equal terms. Will Quakeworld thus define the style of play and tactics required to be considered one of the best? That's likely, The Opponent reckons.

Perhaps all the wussy snipers will be effectively outlawed if they want to make an impact in global rankings. The Opponent, for one, hopes so.

*The Opponent is likely to be found fighting clean and out in the open on TEN and Mplayer under the moniker PCG_Blade. Send comments to blade@pcgames.com.*

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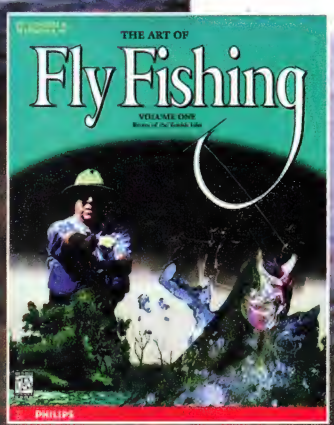

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# Design the Fault Line

By The Levelord
With Tom Mustaine

*He brought you some of the best levels in Duke Nukem 3D—not to mention our handy guide to making your own last September. Now he's taking on the other great 3D shooter as part of the team designing Hipnotic Interactive's Quake add-on pack, Scourge of Armagon. Here's the Levelord's guide to creating your own Quake levels; the road is a little bumpier this time, so strap on your seat belts...*

So, now the Levelord is preaching over Quake levels. First I came at you with some Duke Nukem 3D levels, and now I'm hacking at the Quake add-on pack. I'm not sure about this "Quake vs. Duke" debate, because to me, it's like choosing between pizza and cheeseburgers: I thoroughly enjoy both games and consider myself lucky to have tasted both.

Unlike my earlier guide to Duke levels (see "Build Your Own Duke Levels!" *PC Games*, September 1996, page 43), I won't be able to show you how to design a specific door or fancy trap mechanism in this article. Because of its true 3D capabilities, designing Quake levels is a lot more intense than designing Duke levels. Some basic rules apply to both; for instance, frame rate—the performance speed of the game—is critical. Before you can make a good Quake level, though, there are even more fundamental issues that you'll need to know about. So let's dive in. (One note: The accompanying screen shots are my own examples and don't necessarily represent our add-on pack or reflect final, professional quality.)

## Brushes, Entities, And Worlds

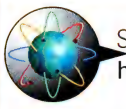
Instead of creating sectors by drawing lines and connecting vertices, as you'd do in Duke, you'll be making polygon volumes, called "brushes," and using them to build walls, ceilings, and floors. You will have to completely enclose all player space with these brushes; there are no self-containing sectors.

The entire collection of brushes that make up your level is called a world. Everything else in your level—doors, bad guys, goodies, traps, light sources, etc.—is known as an entity. Entities are part of your level's map file, but they are not part of its world. Entities can be made of brushes, like a sophisticated door or gadget, or they can be stand-alone objects.

You must pay special attention to most entities when placing them in your level; they must not be embedded in walls or floors, because the game engine will kick them out. If this happens, you will get a message when you load your level stating that an entity at coordinates (X, Y, Z) has dropped out of the world. You may also see a message about monsters walking into walls if they are embedded somewhere.

## BSP, LIGHT, VIS Processes

The map file created by your editor will not run in the game as it is; it must be put through a series of processes. The first stage is called Binary Space Partitioning (BSP), which creates the actual, playable map. Lighting is done in a second stage, called LIGHT; your map will be fully bright until it is passed through LIGHT. The third stage, VIS, is used to speed up your map's frame-rate performance. Until



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*Intrigued by the idea of building your own Quake level? Well, when you're done reading this, check out our explanded version on the World Wide Web, with even more tips, explainers, and suggestions from the Levelord. Go to* **www.pcgames.com** *and click on the familiar Quake logo!*

your map is VIS'ed, areas that are far from the current player's view will flicker between textured and grayed due to memory constraints.

Performing all three processes on your level can take quite a lot of time and slow down your development cycle. Luckily, there are a few time-saving short cuts. As I mentioned, your level is playable as soon as it is BSP'ed. If you only need to check the action of a cool gadget, you only have to BSP. If you only need a quick check of an area's lighting, you can stop after the LIGHT process (no VIS needed). Finally, if you only need a quick look at lighting and the performance gained by VISing, you can run a quicker VIS by adding the command parameter "-fast".

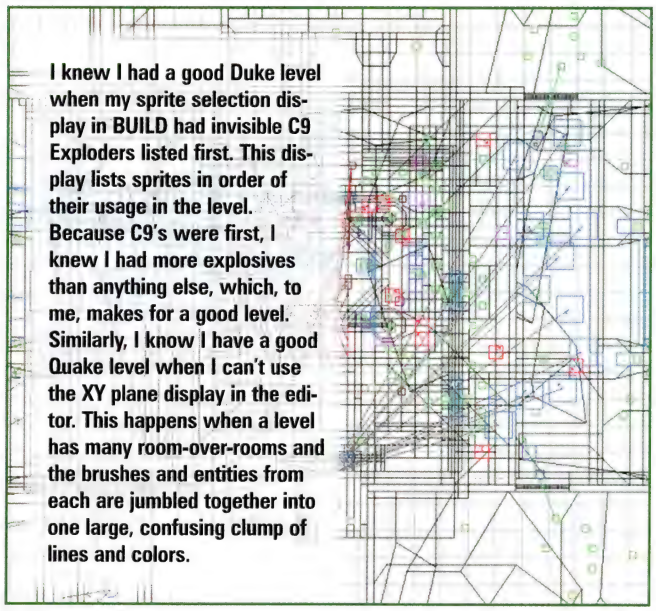
## Essentials—and a Few Problems

In Quake, you need to think hard about such rudimentary issues as lighting, architecture/level layout, and the actual compiling (BSPing, LIGHTing, VISing) process. Lighting is point-sourced, meaning that it is applied to textures and surfaces from single-point origins. This is more realistic than manually shading walls and floors as you would in Duke, but it is also harder to harness effectively. Constructing a good Quake level's architecture and layout is more demanding, because everything is made of polygons, not just sprites and flat surfaces. Ideally, Quake levels are also as vertical as they are horizontal; this added dimension makes building the level more complex. The process of turning your map file from the editor into a BSP file for the game can take hours—at times, even days.

The wicked Phantom of Frame Rate is harder to subdue, too. The factors that act on the intricacy of a Quake view are greater in number and less intuitive in origin. You can't simply throw up a door or wall to help bring your frames-per-second up. There are some tricks, however, to help overpower this beast; I'll get into those in a bit.

Worst of all, there's a new evil in this engine called "holes." Finding and fixing them can be a real ordeal. Quake levels must be completely sealed—that is, as we said earlier, the entire player area must be bounded by brushes. If the brushes don't join exactly, you have a hole—and the level won't work. Not only that, you can't use entities to fill holes.

Since there are already many different level editors out there, and there's bound to be even more soon, I won't get into specific keystrokes or mouse moves. In addition to whichever editor you use, you will use the actual Quake game to help design and fine-tune your level. Quake has a "Console" mode and an assortment of commands that can be used at game time to control such things as frame rate and hole seeking. As most of you already know, Quake's Console is reached by hitting the tilde key (~). The Console screen assumes half of the game display; from there, you type certain commands. Full game view is returned by hitting the tilde key again. I'll show you the most useful of these Console commands later in this article.



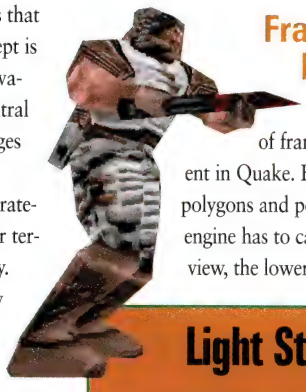
**I knew I had a good Duke level when my sprite selection display in BUILD had invisible C9 Exploders listed first. This display lists sprites in order of their usage in the level. Because C9's were first, I knew I had more explosives than anything else, which, to me, makes for a good level. Similarly, I know I have a good Quake level when I can't use the XY plane display in the editor. This happens when a level has many room-over-rooms and the brushes and entities from each are jumbled together into one large, confusing clump of lines and colors.**

## Think 3D

The one undeniable advantage of Quake is its true 3D ability. The best levels are the ones that use this advantage to its utmost. The concept is simple but very effective—the more the elevation changes, the better a level will be. Central rooms with multi-tiered catwalks and bridges provide fantastic battlegrounds. Attacks from vantage points above, coupled with grate-covered views of dungeons below, make for terrific deathmatches and terrifying single play. Your only limitations to creating absolutely anything in Quake are your imagination and, of course, frame rate.

Try to make your levels as "real" as possible. Think of every detail you can, from lighting and sounds to the actual structures. When designing medieval levels, look at books of castles and Gothic architecture. Make an actual church or slaughterhouse or tavern, not just some slapped-together configuration of structures that have no other similarity than their texture set. Designing realistic tech levels may be a bit harder because you're trying to capture the reality of a time that hasn't come yet. Again, you can get help from some good sci-fi books and movies.

Diametrically opposed to "thinking 3D," and supplying as much reality as possible, is the frame-rate issue. Your level must be playable, which means it must be fast. Many cool gadgets and realistic details have died because they slowed the game speed too much. This is even more critical with Quake because of the Internet. With Quakeworld emerging, clans already forming, and Internet servers springing up, there is great potential for having your map played by a lot of people. Internet play can chug, though, so it's very important to emphasize game speed.



## Frame-Rate Defenses

Tackling the problem of frame rate is quite different in Quake. Essentially, the more polygons and polygon faces that the engine has to calculate for any given view, the lower the frame rate will be.

### Light Styles

0 Normal
1 Flicker (first variety)
2 Slow, strong pulse
3 Candle (first variety)
4 Fast strobe
5 Gentle pulse
6 Flicker (second variety)
7 Candle (second variety)
8 Candle (third variety)
9 Slow strobe
10 Fluorescent flicker
11 Slow pulse, not fading to black

Also, you can't just construct a quick white wall sector or add a door to block a view in Quake. Any entity, including doors, has no effect on reducing high frame rates. Because of Quake's true 3D environment, it's VISing will calculate rooms that may indeed be behind a wall but are still potentially noticeable from the player's current viewpoint.

The best way to avoid problems here is to build your level in a serpentine fashion: make it twist and turn enough that at any given position in the level, other sections of the level are behind 90-degree turns. I've also found that vertical changes have greater effect than horizontal changes; a room that's lower or higher than the player's current room is less likely to be included in the view than one on the same altitude (this also adds to the 3D nature of the level).

The three best tools for checking frame rate are the Console commands R_SPEEDS, R_DRAWORDER, and R_DRAWFLAT. These commands are turned on by setting them to "1" (i.e., R_SPEEDS 1) and turned off with "0". R_SPEEDS will display a set of numbers that allows you to determine polygon count—the most direct cause of poor frame rate. These numbers are, from left to right on the screen: (1) game cycle time, (2) total polygon surfaces in current view, (3) total polygon surfaces actually drawn in current view, (4) total visible (but not drawn) polygon surfaces, and (5) total number of polygon surfaces affected by dynamic lighting.

**Yes, you too can build cool Quake levels with enemies all over and only a catwalk to use for escape.**

The lower the value of the first number, game cycle time, the better the performance is in the current view. You control this number with the numbers to the right. I've found that using the third number, total polygon surfaces actually drawn, is the quickest indicator. Although the fourth number, total visible polygon surfaces, will affect a view's performance, its effect is not as direct. The fifth number is needed when you use any dynamic light sources (flickering, strobe, etc.). Try not to use too many dynamic light sources; if you do, use this number to determine how many surfaces are being affected by them.

With R_DRAWORDER set to 1, you will see everything that the game engine is calculating as viewable. R_DRAWORDER is a great tool for discovering rooms and areas that you believe are invisible from the current viewpoint, yet are being included in the view's calculation.

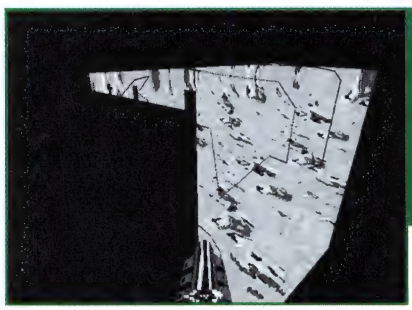
R_DRAWFLAT is a less precise tool, but it will give you a good feel for the way the current view is being diced up by the engine. Often, you will build a seemingly unoffending doorway only to find, via R_DRAWFLAT, that the engine has split it up into numerous polygons—and that means more polygon faces to draw.

## Filling Holes

Finding holes in your level can be one of the hardest things to do. All of the valid player space in your level must be completely sealed—with brushes, not entities—from the outside void space. This void will be seen as large gray areas when a hole is large enough, or not seen at all if it's small. Your level will be playable (BSP'ed) with holes, but you cannot run VIS on it. There are a few tools, however, that will help you.

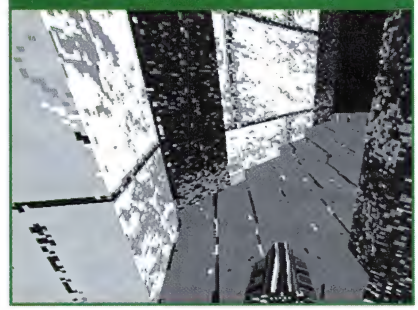
The best tool for finding holes is the Point File. This is a file of connected points that is generated by the BSP process if it encounters a hole. In your level, it will be seen as a long string of points that will lead you to your hole, usually where two brushes meet. The hole is usually, but not always, at one of the ends of the string.

To use the Point File, go into the game and load in your level. At the Console, type POINTFILE. This will load in the string of points. You will need to be able to fly around your level until you find the string of points. I always type NO CLIP from the Console, and then assign or "bind" two keys to let me fly up and down at will (for example, BIND Q +MOVEUP and BIND W-MOVEDOWN). You'll probably want to turn bad guys off while you're flying around; do this by typing NOTARGET 1 at the Console. To avoid worldly hazards such as lava and crushers, you may also want to activate god mode (GOD 1).



**That little snake trail is the dreaded hole indicator; follow the yellow brick road to fix it.**

**Angling stairs is a nice way to get between vertical levels, but make sure you join the pieces properly.**



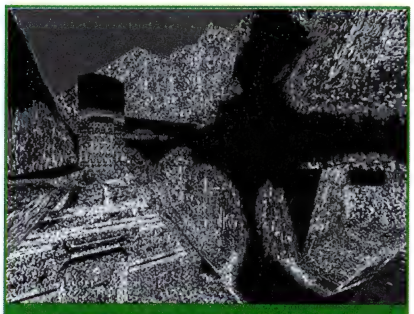
Follow the trail of points to either of its extremities, where you should find the hole between the valid player space and the outside, gray void. There are instances, however, when the string of points does not lead to an obvious leak. The first instance is when your hole is beyond the limit of the total points read in; the game will only read the first 2,048 points of the point file. You can increase the number of points read by typing the command "-particles 20000" at the console. If memory constraints don't allow this, you can also go into the point file itself, via any text editor, and erase the first 2,000 points. When you re-enter the game and read the new point file, it will load the next 2,048 points; hopefully, your leak will be included. If not, repeat the process until you reach the end of the point file.

Many times, a hole is so small that it is almost invisible. I've had instances where two or more irregularly shaped brushes seem to meet completely but actually do not. Usually, extending the brushes well into each other, to ensure that they form a good seal, will do the trick.

If you performed LIGHT on your level and are now seeking a hole, the outside portions, in

the gray void, will not be lit. This can make spotting a hole more difficult if the inside valid space is also dark. In this case, go to the Console and type the command R_FULLBRIGHT 1. This will fully light the entire level, which may make it easier to see a hole.

The hardest hole to find is the one that doesn't exist at all. This can happen if you place a light source or some of the entity types (path_corner, etc.) outside the valid player space. The point file will snake endlessly like a big clump of spaghetti, leading you nowhere. There is no help for this condition; all you can do is a serious scan of your level for maverick entities. Alternately, you can try running BSP with the -verbose option. This will often supply the coordinates of the offending entity.



Mountains are a great way to create perspective and achieve a true 3D look.

## Lighting in Quake

Creating good lighting is easier in Quake because the engine generates light from point sources and does all the shadowing for you. However, you must still pay attention to light-source placement to get the most dramatic effects you can. Streaming light through doorways and windows is always cool. Casting shadows from your more ornate structures has a great effect, too. Keep realism in mind: don't just spread non-displayed light sources all over your level. Instead, make sure there are some flame sources, etc.

Entities do not dynamically light as they pass through the level's world. They are lit separately, based on where they were placed when the level was passed through LIGHT. That means if a door entity was half-embedded in the wall when it was processed, the embedded portion will never be lit, even when it is revealed when opened. Entities often need to be put in separate rooms, never accessed by the player at game time, so that they can be lit correctly.

Dynamic lighting—flickering and strobing sources—exacts a cost in frame-rate performance. Each surface that is affected by the dynamic light source will have to be recalculated each time the light source changes. There is also a limit of four different light sources on any given surface.

## CLIP Brushes

One of the most powerful features in Quake level design is the use of a special brush called the CLIP brush. Essentially, the CLIP brush, when editing, looks exactly like a regular brush; it can be any size or shape. Yet, when your .map file is run through the BSP/LIGHT/VIS process, the engine interprets the CLIP brush as an invisible barrier, blocking players and monsters. The primary use for CLIP brushes is to "pad" areas that may be hard to negotiate, keeping the player from getting stuck on 90-degree angles or other difficult paths.

Making a CLIP brush is simple. First, fire up your favorite Quake level editor and create a brush as you normally would. Then, change the texture name on that brush to CLIP. When you run your level through the BSP/VIS/LIGHT process and look at your level inside Quake, the brush you created will be invisible, but if you walk up to where it was placed, it will block your path.

Using CLIP brushes helps keep the gameplay smooth and seamless. This is extremely important with Internet play. When Quakeing on the Net, gameplay can become choppy because of latency; if corners don't have CLIP brushes, Internet players could find themselves trapped on a corner and not even know it for a few seconds. Installing CLIP brushes can help keep the visible latency low by helping the player negotiate the obstacles in a level without getting caught.

## Importance of BSP File Size and Memory

When building levels, consider the types of machines on which your audience will be playing. When Quake starts up, it allocates a certain amount of memory to play the game. The amount of memory a player has is directly related to how much Quake will allocate.

Always check the actual file size of your .bsp file. If the file gets above 1.4MB, most computers with only 8MB memory will not be able to load the level. If you have this problem, it becomes necessary to chop areas up, and clean out things that may be hogging memory. The two biggest data hogs when building a level are texture data and light data. Don't use as many textures as possible on a level—use just enough to keep the look and feel interesting. When placing lights, be sure to place more bright lights and fewer dark lights. Usually, the more bright lights you have, the fewer light sources are needed; on the other hand, using many darker lights to light an area consumes memory space more quickly.

### Associated Files

| | |
|---|---|
| BSP | Actual level file used by the Quake game. |
| H1 | Hull file. Necessary for VIS, LIGHT. |
| H2 | Hull file. Necessary for VIS, LIGHT. |
| PRT | Portal file. Necessary for VIS. |
| PTS | Point file. Necessary to view the point file. |

## Ready, Set, Build

This article surely didn't tell you everything you'll need to know about making Quake levels; it'd take a Quake College to fill that void. You should, however, have a good grasp of the essentials. With these tools and concepts—and, of course, some cool ideas—you should be able to crank out some awesome levels. ■

### Helpful Commands for BSP, LIGHT, & VIS

Here are some examples of useful commands you'll want when you go to BSP, LIGHT, and VIS a level map file. Type them like this at the command prompt: BSP -onlyents HIP1M1.MAP

BSP
-onlyents: Only entity changes are recompiled. Doors and triggers need to be completely BSP'ed, though, as they occupy space in your level.
-nofill: No leak checking is performed. You won't be able to VIS, though.
-notjunc: Skips the second pass through BSP. Again, no VISing can be done.

LIGHT
-extra: Increases the sampling for shadows (less dithering along shadow lines).
-range x•y: 1.0 is the maximum for lighting range. A lower number will speed the process, but shading will suffer.

VIS
-fast: Performs a quicker VISing for fast checking.

# AMBER

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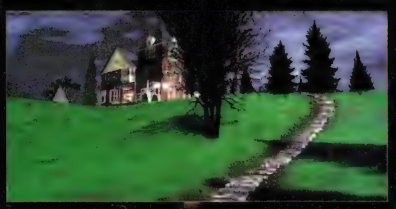

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# You Saw It Here First:

# DIABLO REVIEWED!

***Those diabolically clever Warcraft creators are at it again. This time, it's an RPG—and the genre may never be the same. Join us as we delve into the darkest of dungeons to defeat the ultimate evil.***

*"But I, in truth, have been once here before: that savage witch Erichte, she who called the shades back to their bodies, summoned me. My flesh had not been long stripped off when she had me descend through all the rings of Hell, to draw a spirit back from the Betrayer's circle. That is the deepest and the darkest place, the farthest from the heaven girds all: so rest assured, I know the pathway all." —Dante*

Taken from the first pages of Diablo's excellent manual, this bit of Dante sets the perfect mood for the adventure—or, rather, adventures—that await you in Blizzard's hell-faring epic.

This game is brooding, dark, filled with arcane magic and rituals both dangerous and sinister. Before you're done, you'll feel as if your flesh *has* been stripped, and you've stepped into the very depths of hell. While that may not sound pleasant, it is. Immersed as never before in an RPG, you will be overcome by the depth and challenge Diablo offers, and be justly proud if you manage to survive your trip into "hell" to defeat the ultimate evil.

**By Steve Klett**

Before we begin our journey into Diablo, let's step back a bit to clue in those who have been living in a dungeon and are unfamiliar with this highly anticipated title and its maker. Diablo is a real-time role-playing game rendered in superb Super VGA and played via an isometric, third-person point of view similar to Origin's Crusader: No Remorse and No Regret. You choose to play as one of three heroes: Rogue, Warrior, or Sorcerer (see "Choose Your Hero" on page 45 for descriptions of each). You must descend into a dangerous underworld labyrinth brimming with demonic creatures of all shapes and sizes—all intent on ripping your head from your body and having you for lunch. If you're afraid to go it alone, you can take along a friend via modem, or up to three friends via a network or the Internet (see "Multiplayer Madness," page 43).

The game is brought to you courtesy of Blizzard—the same folks who brought you the Warcraft series, which has achieved megacult status among its legions of fans. Given that following, Blizzard knew you had high expectations for its next game, and it worked hard to live up to them. It shows.

Once you choose and name your character, your quest begins. You arrive in the town of Tristram, which has fallen victim to the influence of an unknown evil of epic proportions. As you wander the town—and explore it you must—you will become incensed at the wrongs inflicted upon its people. Most of the townfolk, you see, have been murdered most vilely.

Being the heroic sort you are, you simply won't stand for this injustice, and embark on a journey of vengeance for the good people of Tristram. Your goal: to uncover the evil responsible for this atrocity. The problem: That evil lurks in the darkest depths of a massive series of dungeons underneath the old cathedral. Before you can get to it, you'll have to battle dozens of types of demonic creatures. The good side is that your efforts will strengthen your character and uncover the powerful weapons and spells you will need to defeat Diablo.

Your task is difficult and multifaceted, but you can rest assured that there won't be kludgey game controls and a difficult interface to impede your efforts. The mouse-driven combat couldn't be simpler to direct: You point and click to where you want your character to go, and point and click on the creature you want to attack. Click a button on the bottom of the screen, and up pops a sidescreen showing all the weapons in your inventory, all the spells at your command, or a description of your hero and how many experience points you must accrue to reach the next character level.

As with classic RPGs, your character has a number of attributes that you will need to expand to gain access to some of the more powerful spells and weapons—and there is a bevy of weapons, items, and spells to uncover and master. As you wander the dungeons and battle creatures, you gain experience and become more skilled.

Your total amount of experience determines your "level," which is basically a rating of your overall lethality. When you increase in level, your combat abilities increase, and you gain points to spend on improving attributes of your choosing. These attributes include strength, magic, dexterity, vitality, mana (spell points), and life (hit points).

That's not all, either: There are Combat Statistics such as Armor Class, Damage (how hard you hit), and To Hit (the approximate chance you have of hitting and damaging a single opponent in combat).

Then there are Resistances to consider. The considerable magical forces in Diablo are unpredictable, and all characters—and creatures—are able to resist the effects of various spells. Resistance is determined primarily by your level, but you can also influence magic, fire, and lightning resistance by using items you find in your travels.

Diablo's character interaction elements share several common traits with classic RPGs as well. For example, in the Town of Tristram, you'll meet Ogden the Tavern Owner, Pepin The Healer, Gillian The Barmaid, Griswold The Blacksmith, Farnham The Drunk, and Adria The Witch, among others. Your interaction with these characters is limited: You can buy and sell items with some of them, but other than that, you can only click on them to speak with them and see if they've anything interesting to tell you—which they often will. The townspeople are full of tidbits of information about the dungeons and magical items they hold, and will often tell you stories about a powerful creature or weapon.

# Multiplayer Madness

**Diablo is a blast as a solo game, but it's even better in multiplayer mode. Why? The game was conceived with multiplayer in mind, and, in fact, is the impetus behind Blizzard's online gaming server Battle.net.**

**The Battle.net server provides an arena for Blizzard customers to chat, challenge each other, and set up and play multiplayer games—for free! Of course, to access it, you must already have a means of connecting to the Internet that has no more than a 500-millisecond latency (call your Internet service provider for this information if you're not sure).**

**Once there, you can play Diablo (and eventually, Blizzard's upcoming Starcraft) with up to three other players across the world. You can play cooperative games, where you all work together to defeat Diablo, or competitive games, where you hack up any other adventurers you see and steal their goodies.**

**Diablo's Internet setup routine is as seamless as it gets. You click a button, and Diablo searches out your ISP and connects you to the battle.net server automatically. Once there, you search out or start a game, and you're off. *PC Games* participated in several multiplayer Battle.net games and found the performance quite acceptable.**

**Be it on the Internet or on a network, Diablo's multiplayer addiction is strong. The different hero types complement each other and make the game more strategic. Warriors, for example, are the front line, used to engage in melee combat and protect the sorcerer and rogue, allowing them the time and space needed to cast deadly spells and shoot their arrows.**

**Better still, players don't have to stay together on a level—they can explore at their own pace and be on different levels of the dungeon at the same time. Multiplayer games are also dynamic, meaning players can join and leave games at will—as with Quake, the game will keep going as long as one player remains.**

**And like Warcraft, you can use Diablo to "spawn" a limited copy of the game for multiplayer games (you can only be the warrior in a spawned game). However, spawned copies can only see each other, so a full version of the game and a spawned game cannot play multiplayer games together. —*SK***

Some of these stories are actually the various miniquests offered within the game—16 in all. For example, on starting the game, you speak with a dying Tristram resident at the entrance to the dungeons. He tells you of a particularly nasty demon that has "butchered" many of his friends and family, and warns you to beware of him. After hearing his tale, you click on the quest button; lo and behold, a quest called The Butcher is listed. Find this Butcher and kill him, and you'll gain an item to help you defeat Diablo. Other characters will offer similar stories and quests that will help you in the long run if you complete them. These quests dramatically enhance Diablo's story and draw you deeper into the game—not to mention its dungeons.

**Getting lost is hard, thanks to the excellent automap feature.**

While its story is strong, perhaps Diablo's greatest feature is that it is different each time you play! That's right—the dungeons are randomly generated with each new game, so they're not only laid out differently, but they're populated with new monsters, miniquests, and items to discover. You can play the game again and again with the same character and never have the same experience twice.

Like Daggerfall, Diablo is essentially nonlinear, which is another of its strengths. You don't need to kill every monster on each level of the dungeon before progresssing to the next, and you don't have to complete the miniquests in any particular order. It's up to you to decide if you're strong enough to brave the next dungeon level when you stumble across its entrance; the 16 dungeons get progressively harder.

For all its similarities to classic RPGs, Diablo is a genre unto itself. If you're looking for the classic RPG experience, you may be disappointed, but it's more likely that you'll be intrigued by what you find. Diablo's look, feel, and gameplay are different from those of any RPG you've ever played. The best way to describe it is as Gauntlet meets Daggerfall: It's part twitch-oriented combat that will have you clicking your mouse like a madman, part resource management, part character building, and part strategy. You will be overwhelmed in the truest sense of the word by Diablo's minions, and you must use your wits and reflexes to survive.

Diablo also comes with one of the best auto-mapping features ever seen in a dungeon-crawl. The automap can be called up with a key press or click of the mouse, and it overlays the game screen in real time—meaning you can still run around or fight while looking at the map. Incidentally, the game also comes with a fine manual containing a tutorial and lots of backstory information that's good reading.

**You'll constantly be fighting as the underdog.**

**The hero interface is slick, giving you all the vital stats you need.**

Visually, Diablo is a masterpiece. There are more than 200,000 frames of animation for the game's 200-plus beasties. The 3D-rendered Super VGA graphics in the dungeons are awesome, and help immerse you in each environment. The special effects

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has begun.
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did for this gamer. Some may find the mouse-driven combat a bit tiresome, but I never tired of clicking on a creature and seeing my mace explode its skull in a satisfying shower of gore. Some may dislike the save-game feature, which allows you to save a character that you can use across multiple games—but doesn't let you save your character in multiple slots in a single game or bring your single-player character online. It's possible to exhaust your resources and find yourself in over your head in combat, for which the only option is to restart the game (you will retain all your acquired attributes and items, however). But this is a rare occurrence.

for spellcasting are stellar as well, particularly the Firewall spell (see screens). The musical score is suitably resonant and dark, further enhancing the mood. However, you'll need a beefy Pentium with at least 16MB of RAM and a quad-speed CD-ROM drive to get the most enjoyment out the game's technical merits; otherwise, it can play slowly at times, with hiccups in animations and CD-access delays.

Where does Diablo fall short? It never really

As with other RPGs, I also found it annoying that I had to find gold to get the people of Tristram to furnish me with weapons, healing potions, and such. I was fighting for them, after all—shouldn't they aid me without getting paid for it? Ungrateful bastards.

Luckily, these are minor complaints. As a whole, Diablo is a must-play for RPG fans, fantasy fans, fans of the old Gauntlet arcade game, and fans of excellent games.

*"A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man."—Joseph Campbell*

## Choose Your Hero

**The Warrior:** Warriors are well trained in all of the weapons of war, and they range from crusading paladins to unscrupulous mercenaries. The warrior is the strongest and toughest of the three hero classes, and he excels in the art of close combat. His extensive physical training has left little time for mastering the art of magic, however.

**The Rogue:** Members of the Sisters of the Sightless Eye, the female "Rogues" are highly skilled archers with an "inner-sight" ability they use for accuracy in combat and to avoid dangerous traps. Not as physically powerful as the Warrior, the Rogue can send a steady stream of arrows at an enemy with uncanny precision. Many fools have underestimated them in battle.

**The Sorcerer:** The possibility of uncovering long-lost tomes of magic in the confines of the labyrinth is appealing to wandering sorcerers. With a greater knowledge of spellcasting than the other heroes, experienced sorcerers are extremely deadly in combat, able to take out hordes of enemies with one incantation. However, beginning sorcerers are quite weak, and easily slain in close combat without a warrior for protection.

## DIABLO

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | A- |
| GETTING STARTED: | A |
| GRAPHICS: | A |
| SOUND CHECK: | B+ |
| OVERALL | A |
| MULTIPLAYER: | A |

**Well worth the wait.**

| | |
|---|---|
| DEVELOPER: | Blizzard North |
| PUBLISHER: | Blizzard Entertainment<br>800-953-7669<br>www.blizzard.com |
| PLATFORM: | Win 95 CD, Mac CD (summer) |
| REQUIRES: | P60, 8MB RAM (16MB for multiplayer games), SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive |
| RECOMMENDED: | P90, 16MB–24MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive |
| STREET PRICE: | $50 |

**TIPS** ▼ Choose your hero type carefully: each has strengths and weaknesses that will result in a different play experience. ▼ Search out and complete the quests as soon as possible—you'll get cool stuff! ▼ The Butcher is a breeze to defeat for a level 5 or 6 hero, a true pain to defeat earlier than that. Save his cleaver for hacking up some of the tougher demons in the later levels. ▼ Don't fight out in the open—it's instant death in solo play. Fight in corners, behind pillars, or just behind a doorway; this will allow you to take on all comers one at a time. ▼ The sorcerer/warrior combo in two-player games is deadly; of course, two warriors, a sorcerer, and a rogue are always better. ▼ Certain weapons are more effective against particular enemies, so choose carefully. Maces are best for smashing skeletons, swords are better for goat demons, and fire spells turn gargoyles into cinders.

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# Tomb Raider

By Daniel Morris

ACTION

Where's the RPG when you need it?

It's getting harder and harder to get people's attention around this office, but everyone gives a knowing nod when you mention Eidos Interactive's Tomb Raider. A 3D action game from a dynamic third-person perspective? Or a clever puzzle game with adrenaline-fueled combat? It's hard to summarize Tomb Raider succinctly. But we'll try: it's impressive.

You're Lara Croft, a hard-bitten hardbody born to the British upper crust but currently working as an infamous treasure hunter (Indiana Jane is the obvious analogy) with skills for hire to less-than-reputable bankrollers. The task ahead is to slip into the depths of ancient ruins in search of the four pieces of a powerful talisman, the Scion. In your way are countless beasties, the occasional human ne'er-do-well, and level after level of deviously constructed labyrinths.

*Indiana Jane...with firepower*

This may be the definitive title of the hybrid action/adventure genre, defying genre pigeonholing. For all the macho gun-waving of its ad campaign, there's not a great deal to shoot at (and the first gun upgrade doesn't even come until the third level). The real challenge is exploration of the 16 massive levels—a complex, time-consuming, and thoroughly engrossing way to kill time at the PC.

There's enough to look at in Tomb Raider to last till next Christmas. From the moment the forbidding stone doors slam shut behind you, you're immediately thrust into the 3D-rendered ruins. A Peruvian temple, Egyptian pyramid, Roman ruins, and Atlantis each offer four levels of increasingly tangled and elaborate mazes to navigate.

Lara's movement and interaction with these sumptuous environments is almost unbelievably impressive. Her running, jumping, tumbling, swimming, sliding, and rolling are incredibly lifelike, and made all the more so by the realism with which her physics are incorporated into the game. You'll need to steady yourself as she slides down a crumbling gravel incline, arms seesawing for balance. You'll grit your teeth as she takes a running leap over a pit and grabs the edge of the cliff on the other side by her fingers, straining to pull herself over the lip and onto safe ground. Fortunately, Lara's a breeze to control with the keyboard.

If I've got any knock on Tomb Raider, it's this: The game has a real problem with clipping, so much so that it can get pretty irritating in some places. In tight spots near walls and doors, Lara tends to phase through the solid objects she's standing beside. Many 3D games are somewhat guilty of this, but Tomb Raider has a definite and immediately noticeable problem with it. The game could have also used more work in the music department to enhance dramatic moments.

As refreshing as it is to find an action game with the emphasis on exploration/puzzle-solving, there's sometimes a little too much spelunking and not enough endorphin surges. Shock attacks by bears and gators and a heart-stopping encounter with a T-Rex keep you on your toes, but gunplay is merely a sideshow. It's too bad, because the shoot-outs in Tomb Raider are lung-arresting: rolling frantically and blasting at a bear with one eye looking frantically for an exit—that's drama, baby. Since this game's combat will make violence-heavy game developers envious, Tomb Raider should have milked it for more than it did.

Still, this is a great, visually arresting adventure for gamers who have seen it all before and are ready for the next step.

If it walks, flies or slithers, blast it!

TOMB RAIDER

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | B+ |
| GETTING STARTED: | B- |
| GRAPHICS: | A |
| SOUND CHECK: | B- |

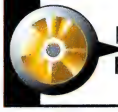
B+ OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

**Superb graphics, tame shooter.**

PUBLISHER: Eidos Interactive
415-616-2022
www.tombraider.com
PLATFORM: DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: P60, 8MB RAM, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card, mouse
RECOMMENDED: P90, 16MB RAM, 2MB video card
STREET PRICE: $50

**TIPS** ▼ Search foliage for well-hidden medpacks. ▼ Be aware of Lara's body language: if she's tensing up, it's because she senses danger nearby or has a hunch about a secret you're passing up. ▼ When battling big beasts like the bear or T-Rex, your best bet is to jump around the room backwards, moving slightly to keep the creature in front of your guns. ▼ You can soften the impact of long falls by gripping the edge of the cliff and then dropping.



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# SkyNET

**By Peter Olafson**

It's the L.A. River, but you never saw it like this before.

ACTION

Hear that crackle? With the release of SkyNET, Bethesda Softworks has turned up the voltage a notch on its Terminator: Future Shock game world. The result is a first-person shooter that's hotter, deeper, and potentially much longer-lasting than the original.

Most of the eight new missions are a delight: large, creative, puzzle-oriented, with sights to see and depths to plumb. Thankfully, they've kept the bland airborne ones to a minimum, and the water in some scenarios throws in a neat new wrinkle.

*He said he'd be back*

The story—laid out in FMV briefings and rendered cut scenes—is built around your pursuit of a huge nuclear missile that's fallen into robot hands and which SkyNET is planning to detonate over an already devastated Los Angeles. Your job, ultimately, is to give it a new target and send it on its merry way.

Caveats: I found the missions relatively easy even at the "hard" difficulty setting. SkyNET's architecture didn't turn my stomach the way Future Shock's sometimes did. And while the new FMV briefing sequences are a nice touch, they're short on authenticity: the actors look more like they've been playing paintball than fighting 'bots.

But the real meat of the game is the multiplayer mode. It accommodates up to eight players, and even with just three or four, it's amazing. These enormous levels—spanning a range of urban, desert, and interior settings—have been assembled with an eye for post-apocalyptic realism, piquant detail (a Budget Air jet has crashed into the HOLLYWOOD sign), and multiple opportunities for garish violence. (Heads *will* roll.)

Do you feel lucky, punk?

The sewer level even has interactive valves that let you flood the level's lower regions. Best of all, you can play against your buds as a Terminator—complete with screen readouts, red-tinged vision, and auto-targeting. And in the deathmatch setup procedure, you get to exercise detailed control over the level's objectives and contents. Sadly, team play isn't an option.

Dive! Dive!

The sheer size of the levels gives them a feel more akin to being in combat than in a deathmatch, and that's a valuable distinction. Add to that a motion detector that identifies the highlighted opponent, as well as the ability to switch between foot soldiering, jeeps and Hunter/Killer aircraft, and you've got a kind of depth I've experienced in no other multiplayer action game.

The downside: SkyNET performed inconsistently on my systems. It worked well under Windows 95—with lightning loads and little disk access—but sometimes crashed while restoring saved games. (Running under DOS, it's slower, but less volatile.) The Super VGA is very crisp—you'll never settle for VGA again—and worked almost perfectly on a Windows 95–based Pentium 200, which it should. But a similar DOS machine running in Super VGA locked up every time the game loaded in a new area.

And there's still room for improvement. The AI's still weak—enemies just move toward you and open fire. The multiplayer mode is aimed at IPX and Net Bios networks and doesn't directly support Internet and modem-to-modem play. (The game can reportedly be played over the Net via Kali, and producer Todd Howard says that modem-to-modem links can be achieved under Windows 95 via dial-up networking.) Also, there's still no level editor—a natural inclusion for this package and a necessity if the game is to live on.

Although this is generally a much cleaner game, some Future Shock oddities are still in evidence as well: robots poking through walls, some explosions freezing in midair. There a few new bugs, too, like huge damage penalties for sliding down tiny sections of slope (slated to be fixed in a patch) and the occasional invisible multiplayer opponent—handy, but not very fair.

So SkyNET isn't all it should have been. But it's a solid step up from Future Shock, and the multiplayer mode alone is worth the price of admission.

**SKYNET**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | B+ |
| GETTING STARTED: | B+ |
| GRAPHICS: | B |
| SOUND CHECK: | B+ |
| MULTIPLAYER: | A |

**B+** OVERALL

**Nice follow-up to Future Shock; awesome multiplay.**

| | |
|---|---|
| PUBLISHER: | Bethesda Softworks<br>800-677-0700<br>www.bethsoft.com |
| PLATFORM: | DOS/Win 95 CD |
| REQUIRES: | 486/66, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive |
| RECOMMENDED: | P75, SVGA, 14.4Kbps or 28.8Kbps modem for multiplay, sound card |
| STREET PRICE: | $39.99 |

**TIPS** ▼ To enter the Cyberdyne Systems building in Mission Three, you'll need to knock down the aerial atop an adjacent structure and make a running jump from the end to reach the Cyberdyne rooftop. ▼ To open the way to the command post in the sub-cellar, look for otherwise-inaccessible passages off the elevator shaft. Before you leave, check out the Tech Noir nightclub for a very neat Easter egg. ▼ The motion detector can only be used when you're on foot, so when driving the jeep or H/K in multiplayer mode, tap the space bar to exit. This will leave you standing atop the craft. Use the MD, and then tap the space bar again to return to your hit-and-run campaign.

# Neo Hunter

Blaze through the bad guys or end up in a bodybag.

## *Anime action blaster*

Fans of hard-boiled futuristic crime drama in the Japanese manga tradition finally have a game to call their own: Ronin Entertainment's Neo Hunter. In a near future where California has seceded from the United States, you're cast as a bounty hunter hired by a senator to expose corruption at the highest levels of government—a task made all the more risky by the senator's assassination shortly after he gives you the job.

So you take to the anime-style streets of the San Francisco Bay Area to track down the killers, while shooting it out against all manner of lowlife scum. Playing primarily from a railed gunsight view, you'll have to mow down waves of attackers, ranging from disorganized street gangs to Mafia enforcers to government strike squads. As you go, you'll collect cash to spend on advanced weaponry and defensive measures. To uncover the clues that lead to a final showdown with Neo-California's sinister shadow government, you'll need to solve numerous puzzles and successfully interact with locals.

Fans of anime classics like *Akira* and *Ghost in the Shell* should enjoy Neo Hunter's story, provided by superstar sci-fi novelist Orson Scott Card; it unfolds between gunfights in a series of sizzling anime cinematics. The culturally deprived will see only a fairly typical railed shooter made noteworthy by a few interesting adventure elements.

The best thing about Neo Hunter is its willingness to bridge gaming and fictional genres in a manner we don't see all the time. Having to blast goons in railed shootouts, analyze DNA evidence in a lab puzzle, pry information out of unwilling perpetrators, and manage resources is a rare combo. Although the game gets less and less interesting as it progresses, it deserves kudos for the effort—and a serious look from anime fans.

*—Daniel Morris*

**NEO HUNTER**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | B- |
| GETTING STARTED: | B |
| GRAPHICS: | B |
| SOUND CHECK: | B+ |
| OVERALL | B- |
| MULTIPLAYER: | N/A |

**Manna for anime aficionados.**

| | |
|---|---|
| DEVELOPER: | Ronin Entertainment |
| PUBLISHER: | Virgin Interactive Entertainment<br>800-874-4607<br>www.vie.com |
| PLATFORM: | DOS/Win 95 CD |
| REQUIRES: | 486/66, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse |
| RECOMMENDED: | 16MB RAM for Win 95, sound card |
| STREET PRICE: | $39.95 |

# Agile Warrior F-111X

## *Not quite agile enough*

Playing Agile Warrior F-111X on the PlayStation was a pleasant revelation. The missions in this flying shoot-'em-up had rich levels of detail and difficulty, and just enough strategy to say they had strategy.

And oh, what explosions. I was hooked.

Most of those qualities have been carried over with reasonable accuracy into the Windows 95 version. Yet, somehow, Agile Warrior PC isn't quite as compelling as the original...and, unfortunately, I'm not hooked.

You pilot an advanced fighter-bomber on 10 long missions (and I do mean long—the first mission took a good 10 hours of playing time) through various hot spots around the globe, each prefaced by a gruff FMV briefing. The plane comes with a cannon ideal for chewing up infantry, batteries of air-to-air Sidewinder and air-to-ground Maverick missiles, and napalm.

You pick up other, nastier weapons along the way (along with fuel and armor) by flying into a hovering 3D icon after destroying a target—which is where the real fun of the game lies. Tanks erupt like volcanoes, oil tanks and buildings detonate like nuclear ground bursts.

Smite the enemy from above.

So what's not to like? Well, the stodginess of the controls (keyboard and joystick), for one thing. Also, the game was playable in unaccelerated 640-by-480 on a P200, but response was just slow enough to get in the way. Agile Warrior does have 3D accelerator support, however, and on a P200 with a Rendition card, it zipped along—even the keyboard seemed responsive.

This Agile Warrior's difficult controls and the high level of difficulty in the missions almost made me quit before giving it a real chance. But, oh, those explosions.

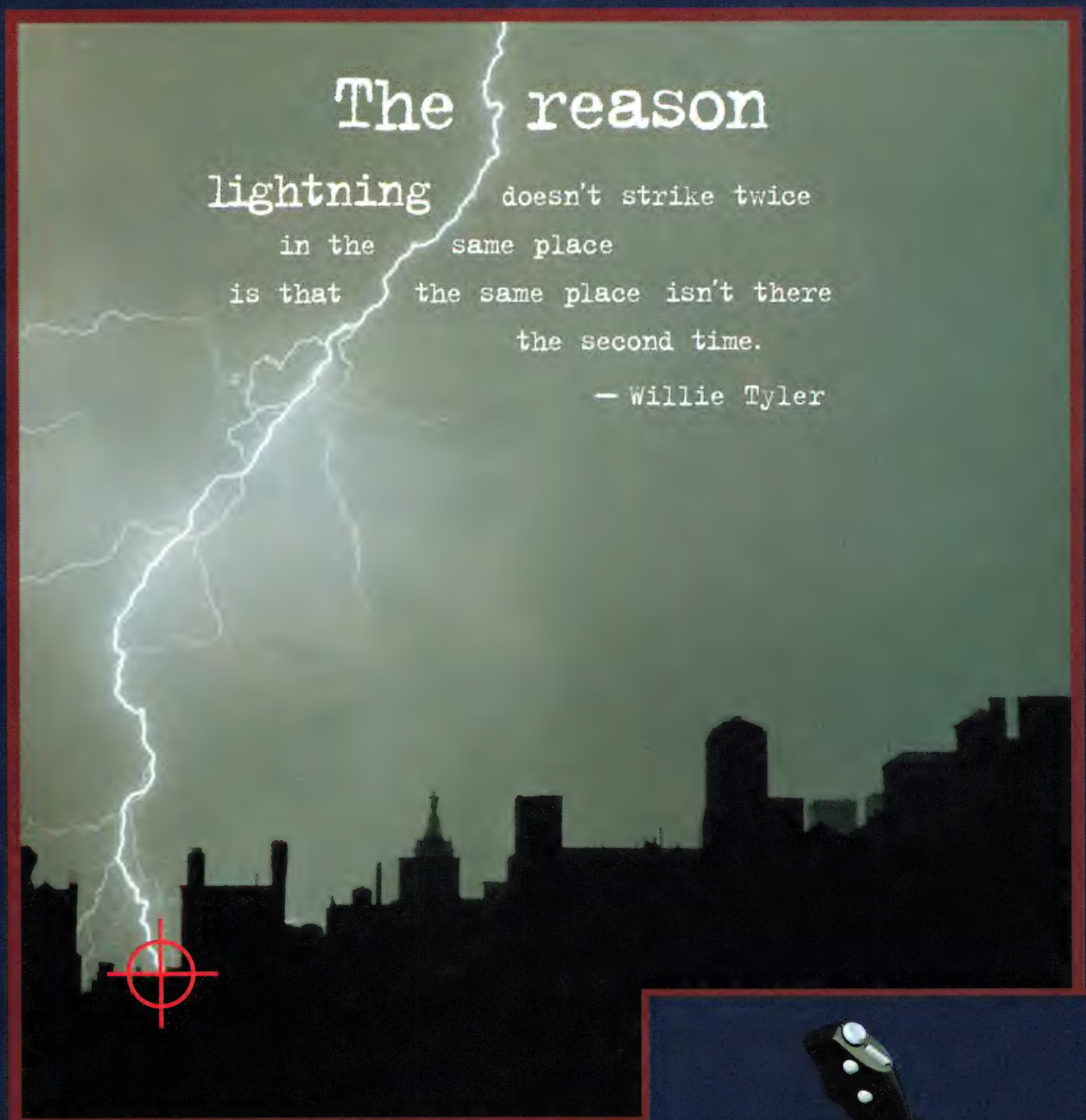
*—Peter Olafson*

**AGILE WARRIOR F-111X**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | B- |
| GETTING STARTED: | B- |
| GRAPHICS: | B- |
| SOUND CHECK: | B- |
| OVERALL | B- |
| MULTIPLAYER: | N/A |

**With 3D power, it's still a tough fly-by.**

| | |
|---|---|
| DEVELOPER: | Black Ops Entertainment |
| PUBLISHER: | Virgin Interactive Entertainment<br>800-874-4607<br>www.vie.com |
| PLATFORM: | Win 95 CD |
| REQUIRES: | P60, 16MB RAM, 1MB VGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, Microsoft-compatible mouse |
| RECOMMENDED: | P120, 4X CD-ROM drive, 3D accelerator card |
| STREET PRICE | $39.95–49.95 |

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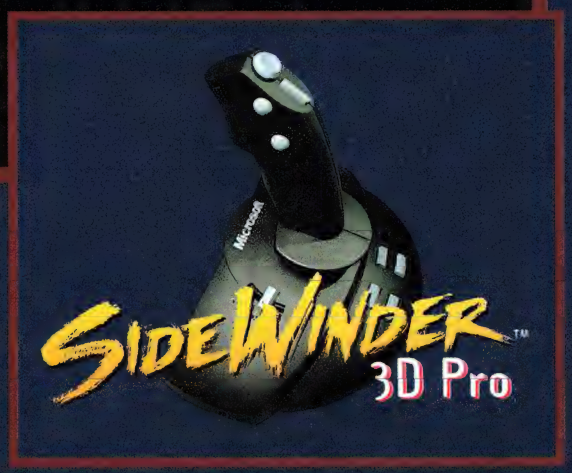


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# The Drowned God: Conspiracy of the Ages

ADVENTURE

**By Donald St. John**

## The Twilight Zone *and then some*

He comes from France.

King Arthur. Avalon. Carl Jung. Einstein. The Philadelphia Experiment. JFK. Roswell. So, is The Drowned God a history textbook?

Hmmm, let's go back to those last three for a sec. Does the word "conspiracy" pop into your brain? Ah, yes, now we're getting somewhere. The Drowned God is at once a version of history sprung straight from an episode of *The X-Files* and a fanciful, beautiful game that mixes maddening puzzles with enigmatic yet immersive adventuring. It's as if developer Inscape had thrown Myst, the infamous alien autopsy film, the codex of Leonardo da Vinci, and Oliver Stone's *JFK* into a Cuisinart or an Umberto Eco novel.

The resulting blend can be quite addictive, thanks in equal parts to the successful air of mystery the game maintains and the superb graphics.

The Hacker's Caravan—the latest in trailer park decor.

Rendered environments, rich in detail and ambiance, mix with such elements as clue-bearing tarot cards, quirky characters, and very believable alien ships to create a feel like few other games.

Inscape used all types of media in The Drowned God, and some of it is stunning; an early encounter with knights of King Arthur's Round Table is presented as a silhouetted black-and-white film that is mesmerizing.

Though that's not to say that you'll always know what's going on. Far from it: Unless you're a conspiracy theorist by nature, you're going to be in the dark for some time. Basically, you're on a quest through four realms for several relics (the Holy Grail, the Rod of Osiris, and others) that, when found, allow you to discover information about an alien-run conspiracy spanning 50 millennia.

Your path starts with Arthurian settings in a search for the Holy Grail (naturally enough) and runs through such spots as Stonehenge, the pyramids, and the USS *Scorpio*, a sub lost in the Bermuda Triangle. Eventually, you learn that human history reflects a battle between two extraterrestrial civilizations—and you have to choose a side.

Would that the gameplay was always up to the standard of the graphics. You'll need to brace yourself right from the start for puzzles that can range from disappointingly simple (a connect-the-dots maze that yields the visions of the Arthurian knights; a conversation between Einstein and Isaac Newton) to challenging (rotating the Rod of Osiris) to hopelessly obtuse (a drinking game against a Knight Templar that I still can't figure out the rules for). They just keep coming, and you'll need to look at *everything* around you for clues.

If you were left on your own, getting through these with any hope of figuring out what's going on would be about as hard as identifying the second shooter at Dealey Plaza. Fortunately, Inscape seems to have realized that some guidance would be necessary—the game booklet contains a good guide to the first realm, Binah, and the puzzles within it. Once you've worked through that, you should be on firm enough footing to tackle the rest of the game. And that'll take you many hours—count on it.

Fortunately, the sheer spread of The Drowned God, and the many characters you encounter along the way, make sticking with the lengthy play worthwhile. You'll catch up with such cornerstones of the mystical world as psychic Edgar Cayce (who comes through over a radio, of all things, with some clutch beyond-the-grave instructions) and noted Satanist/magick practitioner Aleister Crowley. You'll jump to a Web module when you enter the Hacker's Caravan. You'll wonder just why Leonardo drew "people" that look a hell of a lot like that purported Roswell video. Hey, you may even solve the JFK assassination. Not bad for one game, eh?

It's not every day that you get to stroll into an Armored Torso.

**THE DROWNED GOD**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | B- |
| GETTING STARTED: | B |
| GRAPHICS: | A |
| SOUND CHECK: | A |

**B+** OVERALL

**MULTIPLAYER: N/A**

**Enigmatic, strange, but well worth staying with.**

| | |
|---|---|
| PUBLISHER: | Inscape<br>310-312-5705<br>www.inscape.com |
| PLATFORM: | Win 95/Win 3.1/Mac CD |
| REQUIRES: | P75, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, 16-bit sound card |
| RECOMMENDED: | 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive |
| STREET PRICE: | $49.95 |

**TIPS** ▼ In Binah, when you get through the Shield maze and get your first tarot card, go back into the Armored Torso; that's the way to Leonardo's Workshop. ▼ You can't win the first game against the Knight Templar. ▼ You probably won't win the Nine Men's Morris game in the Sun pyramid, either—but it gets a little easier every time you lose. ▼ To get Leonardo's secret alien drawings, solve the number puzzle—even if the clue doesn't look like numbers. (Check the workbench.) ▼ Can you spell "Genesis" in Morse code?

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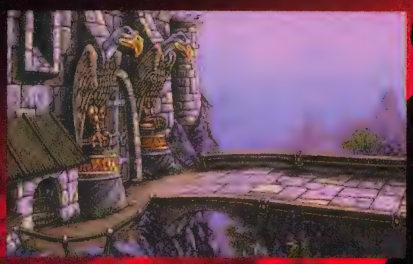

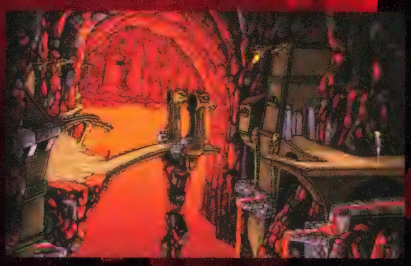

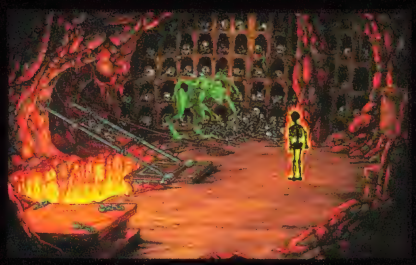

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LEE BROWN, CD-ROM MAGAZINE

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MARK ULYATT, PC POWER PLAY

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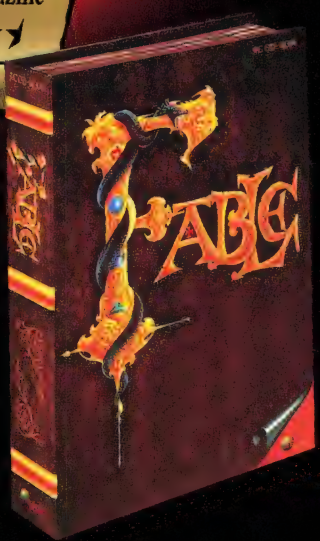
COMING SOON

# TABLE

FIRST REVIEWS
PC POWER 94%
CD-ROM Games 90%
CD-ROM Magazine
★★★★½

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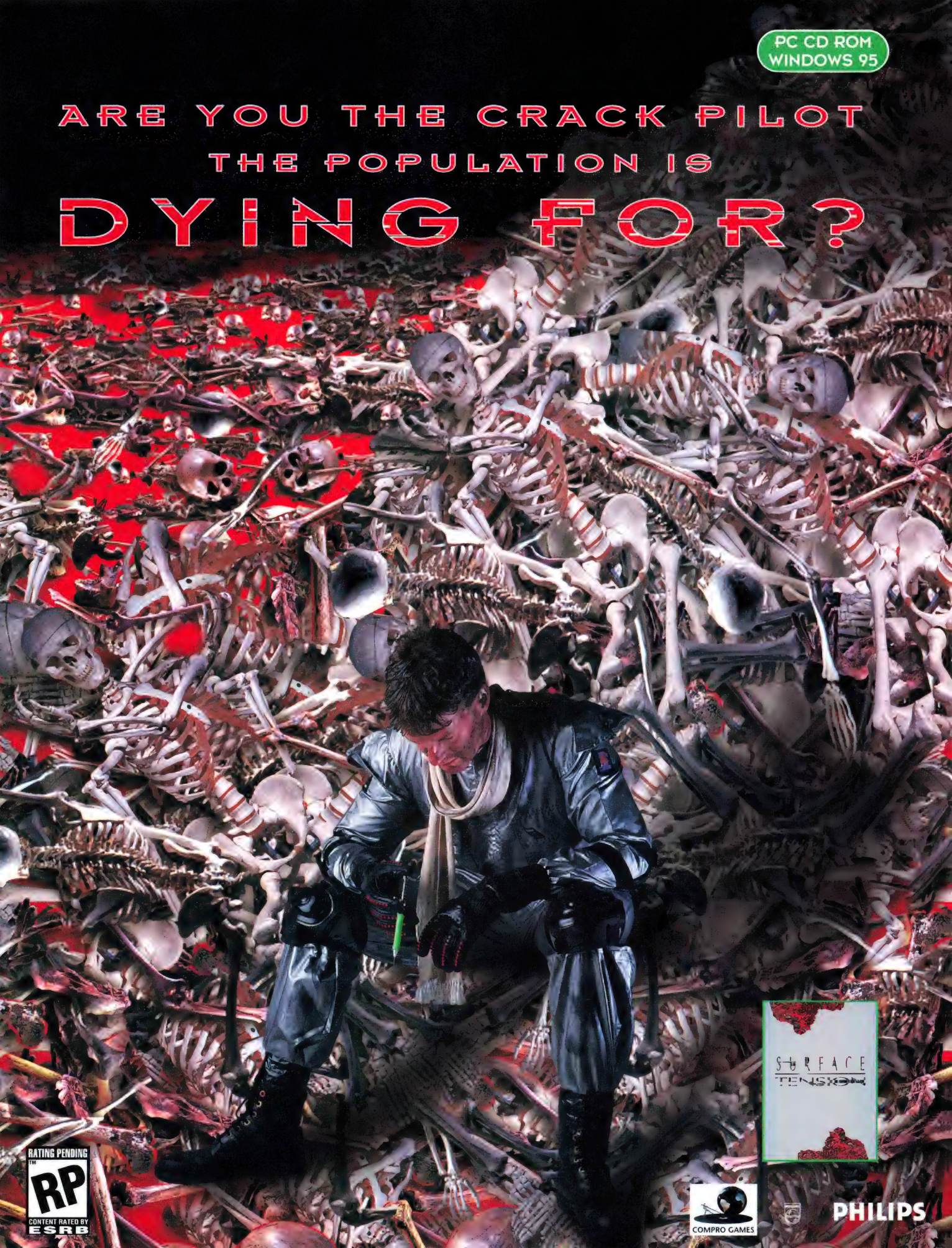

SURFACE TENSION

RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

COMPRO GAMES

PHILIPS

# Titanic: Adventure Out of Time

*Not what you might expect*

ADVENTURE

**By Barry Brenesal**

PC GAMES A LIST

You're a British secret agent—or rather, you were. It's 1942, and you're bitterly musing over the events aboard the RMS *Titanic* that led to your abrupt dismissal from the service 30 years ago. Then, a freak bomb blast during an air raid hurls you backward through time—and again, you're on the *Titanic*. Can you make more informed decisions this time around? Or will the results be for the worse?

This is the intriguing premise of GTE's new graphic adventure. Surprised? Your goal isn't preventing the fateful 1912 meeting between a state-of-the-art luxury oceanliner and a large, implacable iceberg; rather, it's securing the information you need to change the future, and choosing a "right path."

That should signal something different for starters. Titanic is not simply a put-flange-in-slot-push-button-get-object game. It's far from puzzle-deficient: there are 12 puzzles, ingeniously appropriate for this game's time and place, including photo development in a historical darkroom, decoding a message, defusing a bomb, fixing a steam boiler, and engaging in a fashionable onboard treasure hunt to find a gold cufflink.

But what sets Titanic apart from similar stylish puzzlers are the multiple solutions to problems encountered aboard the ship, and multiple endings dependent on whom you tell of your discoveries. There's a huge cast of characters to meet and eight possible conclusions in all—most propelling you forward into an alternate future.

Titanic's environs are easy on the eyes.

Step back in time aboard the ill-fated oceanliner.

You achieve success only by listening carefully to your fellow passengers and being a good judge of character.

The tension inherent in Titanic's premise is enhanced by the superb visual presentation. Cyberflix follows the graphical lead of The 7th Guest and Clandestiny, providing 360-degree views and smooth-scrolling animation as you travel along pre-selected paths throughout the doomed oceanliner. A hand-drawn *Titanic* with a more traditional graphical-adventure look would certainly have been easier to do, but would have broken the tension and created distance from the suspenseful reality.

Some loss of realism does occur when you see a ship guest or crewmember talking. The limited number of animated cels used to generate facial expressions gives parts of the game a jerky quality. Fortunately, such moments are brief, and both the written dialogue and the vocal delivery are excellent.

The ship's layout, furniture, and incidental items are all historically accurate. In fact, you can tour the vessel instead of playing the game. Three of the game's characters will walk you through several of the 60-plus available environments, providing additional photographs and trivia. Several additional tour guides are available at the **www.cyberflix.com** Web site as well.

In the end, what makes Titanic distinctive is the degree of interaction it fosters with ideas and people, rather than just objects. This isn't "interactive storytelling" by any means, and the divergent temporal paths offered are neither subtle nor unbiased. (Preventing the Russian Revolution, for instance, is considered one of the good paths, but isn't that just playing into a gamer's prejudices? Stalin was a madman, but would a Tsar have been any better?) Yet, Titanic goes leagues beyond the usual graphical adventure, which tends to focus entirely upon item manipulation and patience.

Prediction time: The oceanliner *Titanic* sank, and has never been successfully recovered. However, this Titanic will make many triumphant voyages across your computer screen, as you play it again and again to fathom its secrets.

You'll want to explore every room.

**TITANIC: ADVENTURE OUT OF TIME**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | A |
| GETTING STARTED: | A |
| GRAPHICS: | A- |
| SOUND CHECK: | A- |

**A-** OVERALL

**MULTIPLAYER: N/A**

**Original, attractive, appealing, and complex.**

| | |
|---|---|
| DEVELOPER: | Cyberflix |
| PUBLISHER: | GTE Entertainment<br>800-483-8632<br>www.cyberflix.com |
| PLATFORM: | Win 3.1/Win 95/Win NT CD |
| REQUIRES: | 486/66, 8MB RAM,<br>2X CD-ROM drive |
| STREET PRICE: | $49.95 |

**TIPS** ▼ Most of the high-profile passengers have their onboard contacts. They know what you're doing, and if you offend their friends or befriend their enemies, you may not get the information you want. ▼ The timer leading to the *Titanic's* crash starts only after you recover several important lost objects. So explore the ship and interview suspects first. ▼ Trust only when you must. Other secret agents may have hidden agendas. ▼ Check out your portmanteau. A cylinder machine can play music, but it may also hold instructions.

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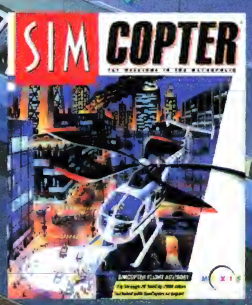


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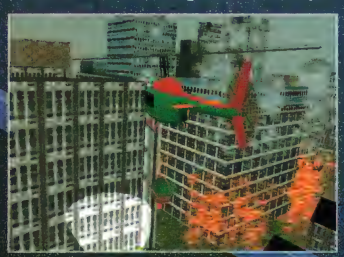

SimCity 2000 not required.
Nerves of steel recommended.

MAXIS

KIDS TO ADULTS
K-A
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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# Leisure Suit Larry: Love For Sail!

*For mature gamers only*

ADVENTURE

By Christine Lam

PC GAMES A LIST

Remember the good old days when you could lean back in your La-Z-Boy and watch the wacky antics of *Three's Company*? Wasn't it amazing how Jack Tripper and his friend Larry Dallas always managed to find an endless stream of beautiful women with loose morals? Years later, that age of promiscuity and polyester is stayin' alive through the babe-scoring success of another swinging Larry.

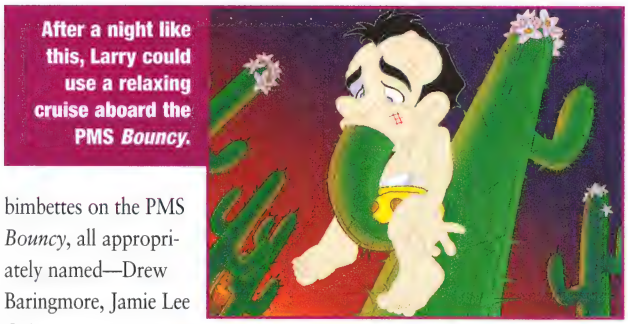
Larry Laffer's latest exploits are now available in Love For Sail! And the newest installment of the risqué series by Sierra has made some improvements to appeal to the legions of ardent fans.

One of them is the CyberSniff 2000, a scratch-'n'-sniff card that serves up an interactive whiff of Larry's adventures, although most of the smells are indistinguishable and unrecognizable. Then there's the CyberStar 2000 utility, which allows those of you with a scanner and a microphone the opportunity to add your face and voice to the game to impress friends and family. Well...maybe it's not such a good idea to show your family.

Larry makes his move on Drew Baringmore while sporting flashy trunks.

Other added conveniences include context-sensitive menus that pop up when you click on a person or object. These let you use different commands, most of which yield some snide remark from the narrator. The ship's map makes moving from place to place instantaneous, so you don't have to wander from room to room on foot.

Despite these changes, it's the same old Larry, with crassness and innuendo packed into every frame. This time, he's out to conquer the many bimbettes on the PMS *Bouncy*, all appropriately named—Drew Baringmore, Jamie Lee Coitus, Dewmi Moore, and Wydoncha and Nailmi Jugg (the Juggs, get it, ha ha). Of course, Larry could never land these women by straightforward means, so he has to win them by hook or by crook.



After a night like this, Larry could use a relaxing cruise aboard the PMS *Bouncy*.

The overall goal is to accrue enough points to win a place in the voluptuous Captain Thygh's bed, and thus the "Thygh's Man Trophy." If such puns annoy you, you're in for rough waters, because puns, wisecracks, and obscene conversation flow like free drinks on the good ship *Bouncy*.

Love For Sail! is highly entertaining, yielding chuckles and outright laughs, depending on how seriously you take the game. As an added distraction, you can play "Where's Dildo," an amusing spoof of the *Where's Waldo* books. You'll also enjoy the foul-mouthed harangues of Peggy, the hideous peg-legged deckhand whose conversation needs to be bleeped out every other word.

Larry still keeps you entranced, long after you've decided to quit for the day. The solutions to the challenges follow a warped and perverted logic that should suit the foulest mind. Love For Sail! boasts bright, vivid graphics, goofy animation, and well-cast voices. Both avid fans and newcomers to the series will find it a smart, humorous, and well-crafted game that they'll probably talk to their friends about.

Because of its sexual explicitness and its rather skewed portrayal of women, Leisure Suit Larry 7 may be construed as a game exclusively appealing to the drooling male who only takes a break from his weekend cyberporn to catch *Baywatch*. However, all of the characters are over-the-top caricatures, creating more amusement than offense. In all honesty, you can find more nudity in any R-rated movie.

Love For Sail! is so hilarious and enjoyable that the greater offense would be to produce a dull, politically correct game with no entertainment value, which Leisure Suit Larry 7 definitely is not. So if bawdy humor is one of your turn-ons and you consider Larry Flynt a noble crusader for the First Amendment, give Leisure Suit Larry a shot. He might win you over.

In pursuit of his musical interests, Larry plays onstage with the Juggs.

LEISURE SUIT LARRY: LOVE FOR SAIL!

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | A |
| GETTING STARTED: | A- |
| GRAPHICS: | B |
| SOUND CHECK: | B |

A- OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: N/A

Larry takes to the high seas in high style... with a boat full of gorgeous, ill-proportioned women.

| | |
|---|---|
| PUBLISHER: | Sierra On-Line<br>800-757-7707<br>www.sierra.com |
| PLATFORM: | Win 3.1/Win 95/DOS CD |
| REQUIRES: | 486DX2/66, 8MB RAM (12MB for Windows), SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card, mouse |
| RECOMMENDED: | P75, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, Windows-compatible sound card |
| STREET PRICE: | $49.95 |

**TIPS** ▼ Click on everything possible, and feel free to be creative when using the objects you accumulate in your inventory. ▼ You can type in your own actions and subjects that aren't on the menu. ▼ Be sure to look in every nook and cranny—don't even say it—for objects you might need. ▼ Remember to save your game frequently. ▼ Honesty gets you nowhere: cheat whenever possible.

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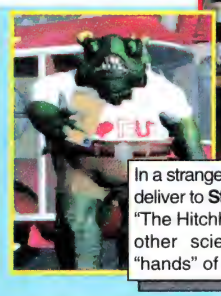
My Mail Was Lost—IN SPACE!

SHOCKING PHOTOS INSIDE!

# Mineola mailman mind-melds with 30-legged space worm to save happy hour crowd from crazed killer!

**MINEOLA, NY**—Lucky Long Islander Pat Harris has encountered plenty of killer dogs on his postal route over the years, but never any killer space aliens—until now! **"I was just minding my own business,** delivering Mrs. Panayatocopoulos' mail when these space guys ask me if I want to go for a ride." Suddenly, Harris was transported to a bizarre bar full of creepy-crawly space critters! Then the wacky E.T.'s made Harris enter the minds of space port bar patrons—including a man-sized worm thing—to retrieve clues that ultimately led space police to a shapeshifting serial killer! Sadly, after returning from the minds of various insect-like aliens, Harris is left with a life-long legacy of flashbacks that cause him to eat maggots and simulate molting. But for Harris, it's a small price to pay for intergalactic glory!

"I want to go back to Armpit VI. There, I'm an intergalactic hero. But here, I'm just another disgruntled mailman that's been abducted by aliens," reveals sentimental galaxy-trotter Harris.



In a strange twist of fate, the mail Harris was supposed to deliver to **Steve Meretzky—creator of "The Space Bar,"** "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" and numerous other science fiction games—ended up in the "hands" of a wide-eyed resident of planet Armpit VI.

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Just another CD-ROM game where you're a psychic gumshoe detective trying to solve a murder by mind-melding with drunken aliens.

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RATING PENDING RP CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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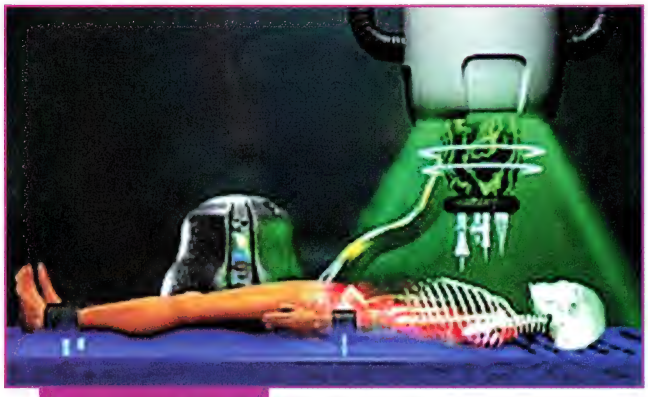
# RAMA

**By Sam Marshall**



Now *that's* an X-ray.

**ADVENTURE**

At first glance, the parallels seem too close to be coincidence. A huge alien ship approaches Earth. Our government, at last facing proof that there is—or was—intelligent life in the universe, is worried about the aliens' intent. Scouts are sent to see if they represent a threat. Heck, the creature on the box cover even looks like a cousin of the bulging-eyed, long-limbed bugger in *Independence Day.*

But enter RAMA with a chip on your shoulder and guns blazing (if you had any guns, that is), and you won't get very far. Brains, not brawn, are what you need to figure out the puzzles the aliens use to guard the inner sanctums of their huge cylindrical station.

## *Uncover alien secrets*

The mission is basic: Explore the alien cylinder to discover its secrets and the intentions of its creators. Who are the RAMAns? Why did they send this ship? And, for that matter, where are they? Plenty of broken alien equipment is strewn around, and you'll have to dodge garbage-collecting droids that don't know humans from trash. But the only lifeforms you'll encounter as the exploration begins are your 11 colleagues and a few batlike creatures.

You'll have a bit of a leg up in this game if you're familiar with the series of *RAMA* novels written by Arthur C. Clarke and Gentry Lee. Not only is the game based on the books, but the two authors helped design the game as well, and you'll find video advice from Clarke interspersed throughout.

Plan on spending most of your time inside RAMA figuring out puzzles to open compartments and doors, as well as searching for tools and other artifacts required to get old machinery working. The puzzles are certainly challenging enough, but don't look for much imagination in their design. They may be a challenge, but RAMA's conundrums are mostly variations on the theme of matching patterns or figuring out number sequences and conversions from one base system to another.

Indeed, some puzzles test your patience more than your mental powers. The key to one portal, for example, is figuring out number patterns in base 16. Unfortunately, figuring out the trick isn't enough. Solving the puzzle requires going through seemingly endless calculations to translate between base 10 and base 16. By the time you're finished, you feel like you've been doing homework instead of playing a game.

The old-fashioned point-and-click navigation and the simplistic methods for applying tools and operating equipment are equally annoying. For example, on finding the tokens necessary to make a laser gun work in one sector, the gun automatically swivels and blasts open a case in another sector. The player isn't called upon to figure out what to shoot, how to aim the gun, or even to pull the trigger.

In other scenes, however, RAMA anticipates the unexpected pretty well. When I continually returned to a section of the ship that I had been told was off-limits, I received progressively harsher lectures. Finally, I was relieved of my duties and sent home. Game over.

Likewise, the animated video sequences are engaging—they seem real and they're smooth—even with the minimum hardware configuration. And the video quality, combined with better-than-average sound effects, makes for some effective moments.

The bottom line is this: RAMA is a Myst play-alike that offers plenty of intellectual challenge. What it lacks is the imagination that is Myst's forte.

With some help from Arthur, you'll learn to dodge these pesky parasites.

Weird alert! Weird alert!

**RAMA**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | C |
| GETTING STARTED: | A |
| GRAPHICS: | B |
| SOUND CHECK: | A- |

**C+** OVERALL

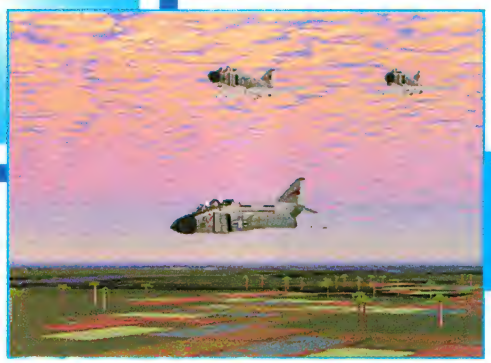
**MULTIPLAYER: N/A**

**High quality, low inspiration.**

| | |
|---|---|
| PUBLISHER: | Sierra On-Line<br>800-757-7707<br>www.sierra.com |
| PLATFORM: | Win 95/DOS CD |
| REQUIRES: | DOS: 486/66, 8MB RAM, local bus video, 3X CD-ROM drive, Super VGA, mouse;<br>Win 95: P75, 12MB RAM, local bus or PCI video, 3X CD-ROM drive, mouse |
| RECOMMENDED: | P90, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, sound card |
| STREET PRICE: | $49.95 |

**TIPS** ▼ Be sure to check your e-mail frequently for valuable clues from other members of the expedition. ▼ You can combine some of the objects in your inventory, such as the flashlight and a crystal. ▼ Watch out for TrashBots: they're deadly. You can spot them on your Radar Map before you enter a sector, and if you're quick, you can back out before they get you. ▼ Keep your eyes on what robots do. You'll get some good ideas about how to open doors.

# U.S. Navy Fighters '97



Fly an F-4 CAP in the Vietnam War.

Ever dreamed about flying combat missions in Vietnam, but lacked the game to do it? Well, now it's here, with U.S. Navy Fighters '97, the latest entry in EA's Jane's Combat Simulations series. The original U.S. Navy Fighters and the Marine Fighters add-on are included with this sequel, which includes four new fighters and all the detailed hardware info you've come to expect from Jane's.

*Finally, a Vietnam campaign!*

Porting Navy Fighters '97 to Win 95 from its original DOS environment has not compromised gameplay speed. The interface is the same as the original's, so Navy Fighters veterans and Advanced Tactical Fighters pilots (that game uses the same interface) should be up and flying in no time.

The four new planes bring the total number of aircraft to 14, although there are more than 40—count 'em, 40—planes to choose from in multiplayer combat for up to 8 players. The famous F-4 Phantom, the F-8J Crusader, and the infamous Mig-17F Fresco and Mig-21F Fishbed-C carry the feel of Vietnam as they fly missions based on events in that historical conflict.

Over 75 minutes of detailed motion video, more than 500 photos, and schematics and descriptions of all the fighters, weapons, and other hardware should satisfy armchair powermongers. Now you can find out beforehand if you can out-turn that Mig-17 in your Phantom, before your tail gets fried in a dogfight.

A $15 rebate for registered owners of USNF is a thoughtful touch, and certainly breathes new life into the original. For those new to the genre, there are few better ways to begin a foray into the world of the flight sim.

*—Christopher Tou*

**U.S. NAVY FIGHTERS '97**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | B+ |
| GETTING STARTED: | C+ |
| GRAPHICS: | B |
| SOUND CHECK: | C |
| MULTIPLAYER: | A- |

**B** OVERALL

**The top-quality original, with plenty more.**

| | |
|---|---|
| DEVELOPER: | Jane's Combat Simulations |
| PUBLISHER: | Electronic Arts<br>800-245-4525<br>www.ea.com |
| PLATFORM: | Win 95 CD |
| REQUIRES: | P90, 16MB RAM, 4X CD-ROM drive, DirectX-compatible sound and video card |
| RECOMMENDED: | P120, video card with 2MB video RAM, 6X CD-ROM drive, joystick |
| STREET PRICE: | $54.95 |

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# Advanced Tactical Fighters: NATO Fighters

*Get back in the cockpit!*

Aerial duels in an F-16C and Su-35.

Every flyboy knows that ATF has reigned as one of the best flight sims since its release. The planes, the interface, the combat—they were all great. But with only two campaigns, most veteran pilots were able to finish the game pretty quickly. Now, with this expansion disc, it's time to clear some hard-drive space and reinstall the original game once again.

NATO Fighters continues the tradition of offering stealthy, exotic hardware by adding four new aircraft: the F-16C Fighting Falcon, EuroFighter 2000, Saab Gripen, and Su-35. As with every other title published with Jane's Information Group, NATO Fighters also sports new photos, videos, and other information about the four new planes direct from the Jane's All The World's Aircraft archive.

You get 13 new single-player missions and 5 new multiplayer missions, though a new "near future" Baltic campaign, with 40 new missions, is the main attraction. Here, you'll protect the various Baltic states from a Neo-Soviet revolution. The new missions use the new planes in a variety of mission types, ranging from basic combat air patrols to surgical strikes deep behind enemy lines.

If you can, you should definitely fire-up a multiplayer game. With options for up to eight players, and all the aircraft available for play, you can expect some major furballs.

With NATO Fighters, ATF offers more replay value than most other flight sims on the market. It may not have the best graphics in the genre, but it more than makes up for that with its realistic flight dynamics for each plane and its mission and campaign variety. Take advantage of the Pro Mission Creator, which lets you generate random missions on the fly, and this is likely to be one very long flight. —*Christopher Tou*

**NATO FIGHTERS**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | B+ |
| GETTING STARTED: | C+ |
| GRAPHICS: | B |
| SOUND CHECK: | C |
| OVERALL | B+ |
| MULTIPLAYER: | A- |

**ATF owners, rejoice.**

| | |
|---|---|
| Developer | Jane's Combat Simulations |
| Publisher | Electronic Arts<br>800-245-4525<br>www.ea.com |
| Platform | DOS CD |
| Requires | 486/66, 8MB RAM, DOS 5.0, SVGA, 2X CD-ROM drive, full version of ATF |
| Recommended | P75, 16MB RAM, 1MB video card, 4X CD-ROM drive |
| Street Price | $24.95 |

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TEEN T AGES 13+ ESRB

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# Battlecruiser 3000 AD

**By Peter Olafson**

**FLY & DRIVE**

Head to the space station—before it crashes.

I'd like to tell you what it's like to play Take 2's Battlecruiser 3000 AD. I really would. But I can't. All I can do is tell you how it crashes—the only thing this elaborate space and planetary combat-sim seems to do reliably. A recalled interceptor docked with my ship, and the game crashed. I moved in on a fleeing enemy: the game crashed. I changed my configuration, saved it: the game crashed. I quit to the main menu to restore a saved game: the game crashed. I just sat there and watched for a while—it crashed.

*Crap!*

You get the picture. I've been playing computer games for 14 years and writing about them for 7, and I can't recall a released game with such consistent problems.

Sure, MicroProse's Darklands was updated a half-dozen times, and the initial release of Sierra's Outpost left out whole features, but the games always worked at some level. Even Interstel's Star Fleet II—the spiritual ancestor of BC3000 in more ways than one—allowed me to play for a few weeks before it gagged on an impassable bug. But BC3000? I've played alpha versions of games that were more stable.

A few paragraphs up, I described BC3000 as "elaborate." Let me amend that: I *think* BC3000 is elaborate. The box and docs seem to suggest a Wing Commander variant in which you're a sort of galactic policeman for GALCOM, running the decked-out battlecruiser *Tiger's Claw*—complete with sickbay, brig, transporters, and tractor beams, more than 100 crew members (including 40 marines) and a passel of interceptors, shuttles, and land vehicles.

Undertake 30 missions, or explore in free form. Send out fighters and then zap into the cockpit and take the stick. Take prisoners, who may escape and steal a ride, in which case you'll have to call on the marines to catch them. Undertake land battles, and these planetside excursions may bring back more than you bargained for.

It's a wonderful idea, in a sense, and a game I've been hankering to play ever since I heard about BC3000 nearly six years ago. Unfortunately, that's a game of which I was afforded far too brief a glimpse. As of late November, the third patch (to version 1.01c, release 2) was *still* crashing. (Take 4 was imminent at press time.) On one of my Pentiums, it always locked up the machine at the end of the first mission. On the other, it took a little longer.

When I was able to play, I found myself oppressed by glitches, non-functional features and determinedly anti-intuitive controls. Some basic commands didn't come naturally, but had to be looked up, and the 30-page manual is a little slice of pure hell.

I see things here—the hierarchical menu system, for instance—that might be praiseworthy in another context. But in the context of a game that won't run properly, they're not worth mentioning. This wasn't a game; this was a struggle.

This is how planets look—until another bug strikes.

The bottom line: If this was a car—as it stands, it's the game industry's Edsel—it would be recalled. Take 2 and designer Derek Smart (who were reportedly at odds over the game's release) should take BC3000 back, fix it thoroughly, test the hell out of it, and re-launch it.

Perhaps then we can take another look.

Meanwhile, this experience should serve as an object lesson for an industry that has grown far too accustomed to releasing flawed or unfinished products and using patches to fill in the blanks: This won't do. A game is done when it's done. Battlecruiser 3000 AD isn't—not by a long shot.

The graphics are okay in first-person view.

**BATTLECRUISER 3000 AD**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | F |
| GETTING STARTED: | F |
| SOUND CHECK : | C |
| GRAPHICS: | B |

**F** OVERALL

**MULTIPLAYER: N/A**

**If it were playable, it might be decent.**

| | |
|---|---|
| DEVELOPER: | 3000 AD |
| PUBLISHER: | Take 2 Interactive<br>www.take2games.com<br>212-941-2988 |
| PLATFORM: | DOS CD |
| REQUIRES: | P60, 8MB RAM, 1MB SVGA video card, 2X CD-ROM drive, mouse |
| RECOMMENDED: | P133, 16MB RAM, PCI graphics, joystick |
| STREET PRICE: | $54.99 |

**TIPS**

▼ How about prayer? The best hint I can offer is to stay away from BC3000 until the problems are fixed.

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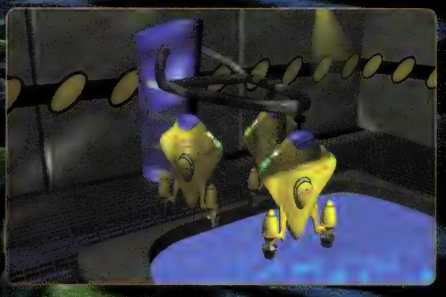

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# ArchMage: War Of the Wizards

*Two teams of mages battle it out for dominance in an explosive online universe.*

ONLINE

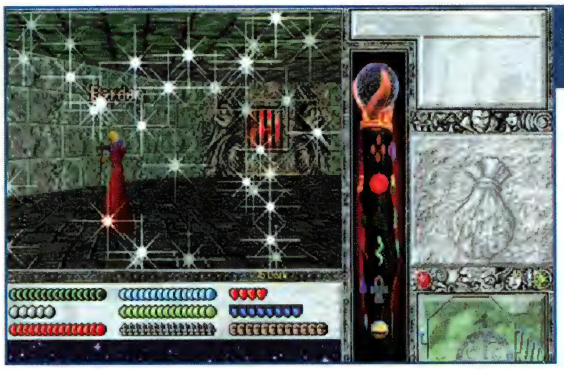
**By Barry Brenesal**

PC GAMES A LIST

Want to see what the latest, greatest multiplayer online games can do? Check out ArchMage on AOL. Furious action and quick-thinking strategy are combined with a dose of elegance, a dash of fine graphics, and lots of fun.

Simply put, ArchMage is Simutronics' Cyberstrike with mages, taken to a much higher plane of sophistication. Two teams of up to five players each compete for control of several large crystal spheres. In the tradition of capture-the-flag, a team establishes control by touching a sphere and changing it to their color, either red or blue. Whichever team succeeds in establishing control of all the spheres simultaneously (or removing all the opposing team's players) wins the competition.

There's a lot more to it than this, of course. Mages aren't just generic, plain-vanilla spellcasters: They come in five varieties, each associated with a particular "realm" of magical energy. Realms provide the power behind different types of spells; for instance, the magical energy of Illusion allows a player to cast Invisibility. Each mage can cast any spell, but spells associated with a mage's own realm cost less to cast.



A healing orb revives an ailing wizard.

All players arrive in ArchMage equipped with a staff that stores up to six spells for each of its four sides. Before starting a competition, a player "imbeds" his staff with up to 24 spells.

When I tried ArchMage, there were 90 spells in place; another 90 were expected before the game opens to the public in February. A wide range of combat spells, including lightning bolts or pillars of flame, is balanced by protective spells against attacks by specific elements. There are also spells that heal, lock doors, teleport, and move objects that are apparently out of reach.

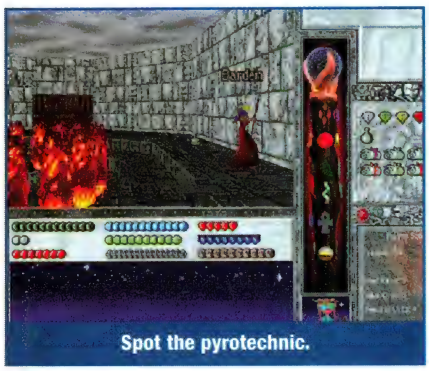
ArchMage also hides objects such as potions, gems, and scrolls. Some of the wildest visual effects in the game are associated with throwing gems. There's nothing like seeing multiple tongues of flame ricocheting off a far wall in all directions, incinerating an unsuspecting opponent.

There are over a dozen competition arenas, including the Forest Maze, the Ice Castle, and the Volcano, with further environments on the way from ArchMage's behind-the-scenes gamemasters. But don't expect the graphical detail common in standalone games. Phone connections, user load, and other factors require graphics that can redraw much faster.

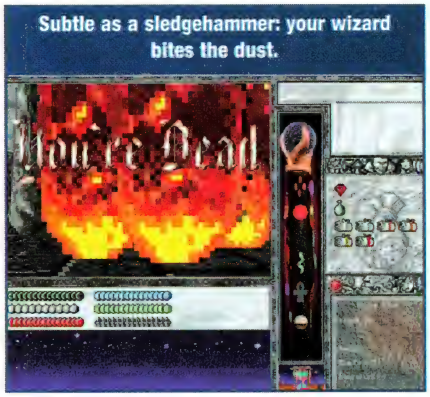
ArchMage's main interface, the Chamber Screen, combines ease of use, attractive style, and configurability. It provides excellent context-sensitive online help and chat facilities, and informs you of competitions awaiting more players. It also allows you to organize spell lists in alphabetical order or by casting cost to prepare for action. A line map automatically follows your progress in the game (with multiple magnification levels), and there's a see-at-a-glance scorecard, a currently active spell-effects list, and lists of your current team members and the opposition.

ArchMage combines the aggressive instincts of Rambo, the magic skills of Merlin, and the thought processes of Machiavelli in a combustible mix that's sure to prove popular.

Dueling wizards sling spells at each other.



Spot the pyrotechnic.




Subtle as a sledgehammer: your wizard bites the dust.

ARCHMAGE

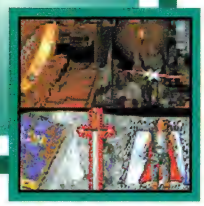
| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | A- |
| GETTING STARTED: | B |
| GRAPHICS: | B |
| SOUND CHECK: | B |

A- OVERALL

MULTIPLAYER: A-

An online wonderland.

| | |
|---|---|
| DEVELOPER: | Simutronics |
| PUBLISHER: | Virgin Interactive Entertainment<br>www.vie.co.uk<br>800-874-4607 |
| PLATFORM: | Win 95 CD |
| REQUIRES: | P90, 16MB RAM, 28.8Kbps modem, AOL 3.0 |
| STREET PRICE: | Provider-dependent |



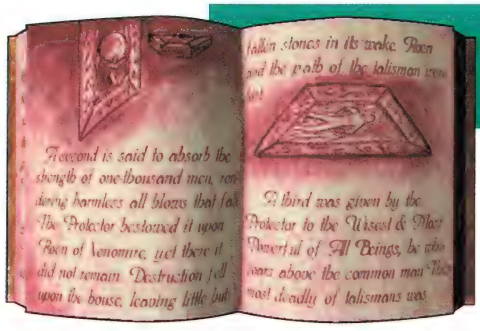
ROLE PLAY

# Nemesis: A Wizardry Adventure

*Enter the Realm of Galican—if you dare*

By Jason D'Aprile

Nemesis: A Wizardry Adventure, Sir-Tech's second attempt at creating a more user-friendly and simplified adventure/role-playing game (Druid was the first), resembles either a cross between Zork: Nemesis and Stonekeep or a more advanced Dragon Lore.



You'll find plenty of informative reading on your quest, but not all of the tomes are particularly straightforward.

This is an entirely graphics-based single-player adventure with character development and combat variables similar to those of a traditional RPG. It's likely to find more of a home among graphical adventure/puzzle lovers than among actual Wizardry fans, however, because you won't find much of the Wizardry series' deep and complex role-playing system here.

In the land of Galican, you play a lone adventurer suddenly attacked by a foul shadow creature. After being rescued by a wizard, you discover that you're the only one who can save the realm from an ancient evil seeping into the land and corrupting everything in its path.

Nemesis is played in point-and-click style with rendered cut scenes (no live action); it's a sizable adventure spread out over five CDs. Control is similar to that of Stonekeep and other first-person RPG/adventures. There's a choice between step-by-step screen advancement or rendered movement scenes, but the latter tended to slow my game down noticeably (and I was testing it on a P133). I was a bit disappointed by the lack of character interaction—conversation is generally handled through cinematic sequences. Item interaction is fully covered, though: There are plenty of bits to pick up, use, and drop. The magic system focuses on your character's mastery of the elements, which you develop over time as you learn new spells.

Unlike most graphic adventure games, Nemesis also contains real-time combat. Unfortunately, this is probably its weakest aspect. Using the mouse, you attack with either hand (or hold a shield to defend in one hand), and can even yield range weapons like crossbows. But fighting takes some getting used to, because it involves both aiming at the point on the target you want to hit and moving the mouse in the proper motion for the type of blow you wish to inflict. Because there's no option to make the combat easier to handle, this aspect of the game may well turn off adventure fans who would otherwise have been drawn to Nemesis.

There are plenty of strange and fantastical beings at every turn. And some of them are even friendly.

Visually, Nemesis gives you plenty of finely detailed, 3D-rendered scenes to move freely through. Forests, towns, caverns, castles, and other visual wonders await, and the variety of things to see, combined with clever puzzles and an involving storyline, are likely to keep adventurers involved. Some of the spell visuals in particular are stunningly cool. Nemesis sounds good, too, with an enjoyable score and plenty of eerie, appropriate sound effects. When you examine an item, you hear the voice of the hero telling you, to the best of his knowledge, what you're looking at. This part of the game is handled very well: Sir-Tech provided your character with a distinctive and amusing personality, the likes of which I haven't seen since Duke Nukem.

Overall, Nemesis: A Wizardry Adventure is a very solid play. You may find the combat annoying, but the rest of the game is topnotch. Filled with striking visuals, a decent storyline, interesting puzzles, and lots to explore, Nemesis should provide quite a few hours of adventuring for fans of games like Stonekeep and Lands of Lore.

The elemental spells can be used for both offensive and defensive purposes, depending on your target.

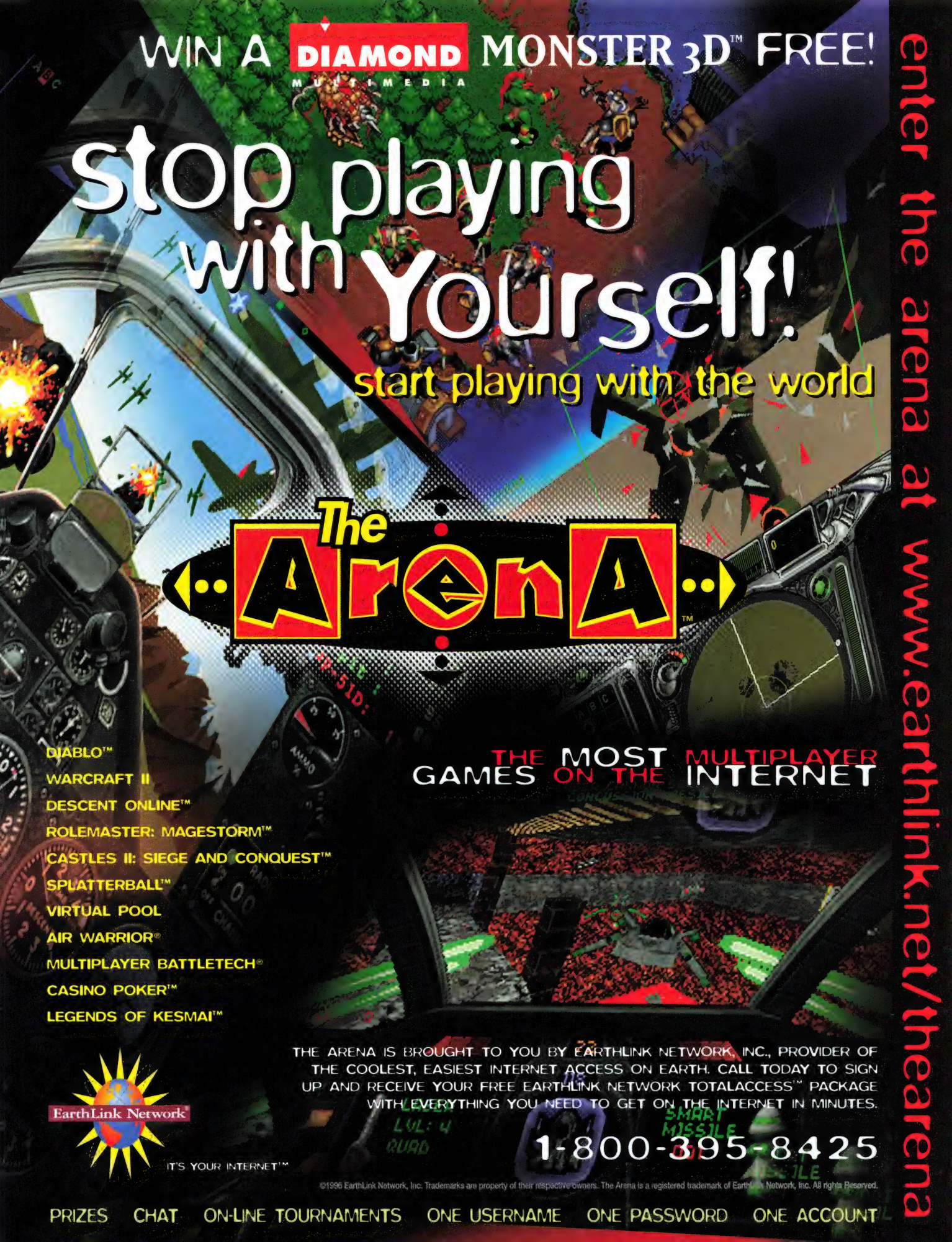
**NEMESIS: A WIZARDRY ADVENTURE**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | B+ |
| GETTING STARTED: | B |
| GRAPHICS: | B+ |
| SOUND CHECK: | B+ |
| OVERALL | B- |
| MULTIPLAYER: | N/A |

**Clunky real-time combat doesn't mar this involving graphical adventure.**

| | |
|---|---|
| PUBLISHER: | Sir-Tech Software<br>800-447-1230<br>www.sir-tech.com |
| PLATFORM: | DOS CD |
| REQUIRES: | 486/66, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, SVGA |
| RECOMMENDED: | 16MB RAM |
| STREET PRICE: | $49.95 |

**TIPS** ▼ Get a good blade a soon as possible. ▼ Remember that there are killler traps, some of which are based on how many moves you make. So if you come to something that looks suspicious, save the game before proceeding. ▼ Both combat and spell use take some getting used to, and the pigmen in the forest are perfect training fodder. Just be sure to watch your back and side.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# Microsoft Soccer

Smaller sprites in the wide-angle view make following the action tricky.

Cast your mind back to FIFA '95, when the solitary 3D isometric view was a pretty good thing. In today's soccer sims, it's a bit limited to say the least—which is probably as complimentary as it gets for Microsoft Soccer.

MS Soccer is a basic arcade-style soccer sim featuring 90 of the world's national teams. No real player names are used, although the fictional players have been bestowed with fictional stats to give the teams some individuality.

*Goooaaallllll! Not!*

In-game options include having a referee on the field and making the players cast shadows. Actually, the player sprites are one of the high points; there's no motion capture, but fluid animations make them look realistic and move smoothly. It's a pity they're so tough to control. There's no sense of weight in the players—it's virtually impossibly to block a ball and get it under control. Likewise, timing headers and other aerial movements is exceedingly difficult.

That said, passing movements are quite fluid with a few sharp kicks. Shooting is controlled with a fast power meter, which creates a decent soccer feel if everything goes well. But it's just so damn unrealistic how the players can't command their own space, don't pick up the ball and get it under control quickly, and display a startling lack of intelligence (well, I guess that's a touch of realism). Nor is there any offside rule or backpass rule in effect; perhaps Microsoft is trying to shape soccer's rules for the future.

The sound effects suck horribly. Odd chants and pathetic whistles are irritating rather than absorbing, removing any vestige of atmosphere from an already dull game. Formation selection, team editing to get the names you want, and a pointless kit editor add very little to the overall package.

Single games and 16-team tournaments make up the play options. A two-player LAN or modem game may add a little to the longevity, but to fulfill your soccer-gaming needs, buy FIFA '97 or VR Soccer '96. Microsoft Soccer's gameplay is just too poor. —*Rob Smith*

**MICROSOFT SOCCER**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | D |
| GETTING STARTED: | D |
| GRAPHICS: | B |
| SOUND CHECK: | F |
| **OVERALL** | **D-** |
| **MULTIPLAYER:** | **D** |

**If it's $10, it won't be a complete waste of money.**

| | |
|---|---|
| PUBLISHER: | Microsoft<br>800-426-9400<br>www.microsoft.com/games/ |
| PLATFORM: | Win 95 CD |
| REQUIRES: | 486/66, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, SVGA, mouse |
| RECOMMENDED: | P75, 12MB RAM, 2MB graphics card, sound card |
| STREET PRICE: | $39.95 |

# HyperBlade

With an accelerator card, the action is gorgeous to behold.

Whatever else you can say about it, HyperBlade's futuristic sports premise is certainly riveting. You compete in a 21st-century version of roller hockey meets football meets bloody mayhem—with the rulebook thrown out the window.

Each of the 12 international HyperBlade teams consists of five players: two starters, two subs, and a goalie. The action takes place in a vast arena resembling a barrel that has been cut in half. A circular goal, guarded by a goalie, is at each end of the barrel. The object is simple: toss the "rok" past the goalie more times than the other guys. Not an easy task, given that the opposing team will use any means necessary to stop you, including chopping your head off.

*Just shoot the rok, baby!*

That's right—the custom armor suits include a nasty razorlike appendage that's quite deadly. There's also a wide range of obstacles—bombs, projectiles, electric gates, walls, and revolving arrays of razor blades—to avoid while skating at high speeds. Slip up, and you'll suffer a rather unsightly end to a promising career.

The computer opponents on the Pro and All-Star levels are very aggressive, and you'll be wanting for more subs on the bench very quickly. You can't replace players that get killed in the Gauntlet (tournament mode).

HyperBlade is entertaining, but it could have been much more. For one thing, there's no trade-player options or accumulation of stats for a tournament. A season mode would have been fun, too. And the constantly shifting camera perspective makes spotting—and thus, avoiding—opposing players tough. Landing on your butt for no apparent reason happens far too often.

Still, HyperBlade's good fun in head-to-head play via modem or four-way play over a network. And it looks great, too—if you've got an accelerator card and all the proper drivers, and can get the game to work with them. —*Steve Klett*

**HYPERBLADE**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | C+ |
| GETTING STARTED: | B- |
| GRAPHICS: | C+ |
| ACCELERATED: | B+ |
| SOUND CHECK: | B+ |
| **MULTIPLAYER:** | **B** |
| **OVERALL** | **B-** |

**Fun, but it needs some polish.**

| | |
|---|---|
| PUBLISHER: | Activision<br>800-477-3650<br>www.activision.com |
| PLATFORM: | Win 95 CD |
| REQUIRES: | P90, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive |
| RECOMMENDED: | 16MB RAM, 3D graphics accelerator, gamepad |
| STREET PRICE: | $49.95 |

STRATEGY

# Command & Conquer: Red Alert

*Stop Stormin' Stalin*

By Rob Smith

PC GAMES A LIST

A curious game was Command & Conquer (C&C). On the one hand, it was a smash hit—a big seller that brought real-time strategy games to the fore and spawned dozens of clones. Four-player games were a welcome strategic respite from the constant stream of first-person shooters, and C&C became *the* game to play via modem or over the Internet or office LAN.

On the other hand, C&C was almost universally chastised for lousy AI in single-player mode. Other gripes could be listed, but we've been there before.

However, Red Alert could be a new start. Let's face it: Whatever the limitations of the original, everyone was interested to see what would happen with the follow-up. The conclusion? Well, that's a tough one to call.

Let's set the context: Red Alert is intended, in part, to flesh out the story and history of the C&C universe. Set in a time before the original, it takes place in a new Europe where Hitler has been assassinated at an early age (by Albert Einstein, of all people). But thoughts of this creating a safer, WWII-free Europe are dashed by another dictator: Stalin. His Red Army is surging into mainland Europe, destroying much of what stands in its path. You've got quite a battle on your hands to help the Allies defeat this threat. Of course, on the second disc of this two-CD set, you can also lead the Soviets to achieve Red dominance.

More than 40 single-player missions, about 20 per side, describe what comes to be a captivating story of an all-too-real potential past. Certain Allied missions have time limits, as spies are chased across snowy landscapes and convoy routes need protection. The Allies have more strategic concerns as they fight on many fronts against the might of the Red Army. For the Soviets, destruction is a key element. Although not politically correct, the objective of the first mission—to destroy everyone and everything, civilians included—superbly sets the contrast to the Allies' carefully planned tactical maneuvers. In addition, missions using small squads of troops to infiltrate buildings add a valuable opportunity for more detailed involvement in plot developments.

Indoor missions add a key new element to strategic planning.

Stepping back in time for the setting could have hindered the variety and spice of some of the gadgetry used to obliterate opponents. The issue has been neatly side-stepped by incorporating scientists like Einstein and Nikola Tesla into the plot. Tesla's coils fire electric blasts inflicting huge damage, but were used, allegedly, alongside Einstein's Unified Field Theory in 1943 on the USS *Eldridge*. This caused it to disappear for several minutes in what's become known as the Philadelphia Experiment. Working models of these two scientists' developments add the teleporting Chronosphere and invulnerability-inducing Iron Curtain to the potential armaments.

In multiplay, use fake structures to convince your opponent you're heavily equipped.

In terms of more mainstream military hardware, one of the most important additions is naval vessels. The Allies need to build gunboats, destroyers, cruisers, and armor transports, while the Soviets counter with submarines. Curiously, it seems the AI cheat in the original version of placing sandbags leading to an opponents' base and then building laser turrets to blast it is not "fixed" per se, but side-swiped by forcing the Allies to construct bases on islands and then transport equipment across sub-infested seas to get to the enemy base. It is, technically, still possible to use this trick. Oops.

Alongside significantly enhanced air combat forces—Allied Apaches against Soviet Hinds, MiGs, spy planes, and bombers (which drop paratroopers and bombs into enemy territory)—the combination of land, sea, and air forces sets up intriguing battles.

While heavier armor, tanks, and hardware are certainly the key to successful multiplayer battles, individual character units make more of an impact in the single-player game. Engineers have been adjusted so that they can now repair their own

Aim for the oil barrels (by the Tesla's coil) to see some fireworks.

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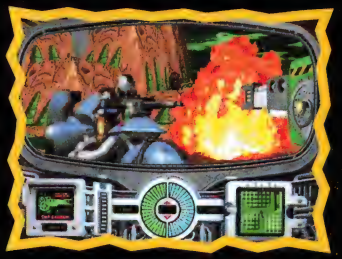

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buildings, so enemy structures need to be damaged to the red zone before they can be taken over. Westwood also listened to the pleas of C&C devotees by adding Medics who fully heal injured infantry with a simple click, but who need protecting during the main thrust of combat. Swift implementation of their skills gives second wind to troops on the ground who, with luck, can tip the balance of a battle. And the mercenary Tanya—describing her as Rambette may be considered sexist, but it's accurate—finds a Medic a crucial ally in her one-woman rampages.

Spies—an amusing parody of James Bond—sneak into enemy camps and uncover details of their technology. Infantry are fooled by the spies' appearance, but attack dogs aren't. These pooches are vicious: Though easily put to sleep at range, they can cause havoc among infantry groups if they get close enough. Since there's no honor in war, the Allies employ thieves to enter Soviet ore silos and lift half the credits contained within.

Destroying or defending key bridges is a vital tactic in certain missions.

Soviet forces are more military-centric and just employ infantry yielding new flamethrowers to barbecue the Allies.

Red Alert is still resource-based. In the days before Tiberium (the ore you mine in C&C), an unnamed ore does the same job but also comes in two types: a generic ore and a more expensive gemstone ore eliciting three times the number of credits from one load.

When you get down to it, Red Alert is still C&C at heart. The new Super VGA graphics make a larger portion of the maps visible, but the graphics are far from stunning. However, the larger playing area is easily navigated using function key bookmarks, which are helpful for jumping to important areas of the map.

Subs protect a mammoth tank invasion, supported by a MIG bombing run.

Collect the colorful gemstone ore for more cash.

Many of the sound effects are identical to the original, with new responses from the new unit types. And successfully completing each mission is still rewarded with a dazzling scene. Be it rendered animation or hammily acted video, these scenes succeed in adding flavor and a sense of urgency and scale to the conflict.

As with its forebear, Red Alert will score highly in multiplayer mode, a fact Westwood is evidently aware of as a range of options are included to make finding players and getting hooked-up easy. Twenty mutliplayer maps of varying sizes are included, and a map editor stretches this option to infinity. On top of this, there are a number of in-game functions and units available only in multiplay. Among these are fake structures: Once a structure has been completed, you can build fakes at a fraction of the cost to confuse the enemy.

Since multiplay also supports up to eight players—compared to C&C's four—there aren't just different colors to represent different sides. Instead, there are three Allied options (England, France, and Germany) and two Soviet sides (Russia and the Ukraine). To add a little variation, each side is slightly better equipped to deal with one particular area of combat, be it speed (Ukraine), armor (England), or the ability to build things at a slightly lower cost (Russia).

Furthermore, Planet Westwood software contained on the CD allows access to Westwood-hosted chat areas online where new opponents can be found. Not that finding opponents will prove tough with the number of C&C veterans likely to add Red Alert to their collections.

It's comes down to this: If you loved the original, you'll consider Red Alert a superb follow-up. If you were frustrated by C&C's errant AI, irritated by occasional units not moving where instructed, or annoyed by enemies standing idly by while they're riddled with bullets, then expect more of the same. It bugged the hell out of me, that's for sure, but I kept coming back because part of Red Alert's beauty is its accessibility—you've got speed and excitement all packaged in an intriguing story without the need for extensive background reading. Personally, I think it's smashing.

## COMMAND & CONQUER: RED ALERT

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | A- |
| GETTING STARTED: | A- |
| GRAPHICS: | B |
| SOUND CHECK: | B |
| OVERALL | A- |
| MULTIPLAYER: | A |

**More, better C&C.**

| | |
|---|---|
| PUBLISHER: | Westwood Studios<br>800-874-4607<br>www.westwood.com |
| PLATFORM: | DOS/Win 95 CD |
| REQUIRES: | Pentium, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, 1MB graphics card (DirectDraw-compatible), mouse |
| RECOMMENDED: | P100, 16MB RAM, sound card, 28.8Kbps modem for Internet play |
| STREET PRICE: | $54.99 |

**TIPS** ▼ Tanks can't shoot down infantry, so run them over. (Crunch!) Ore trucks are particularly adept at squishing irritating soldiers. ▼ Protect your ore trucks. They're too valuable to be left to their own devices. ▼ As the Allies, build rocket soldiers to protect against aerial attacks until AA sites are built. ▼ Moving gunboats and destroyers fast while still firing at subs will help save them. ▼ Radar domes are vital for seeing where the enemy is attacking. ▼ Only dogs see spies, so watch their patterns of guard duty and avoid them.

STRATEGY

# Steel Panthers II: Modern Battles

*From Korea to the Crimea with SSI's time-tested game engine*

By Daniel Morris

PC GAMES A LIST

SSI's groundbreaking Steel Panthers still gets a regular workout on many PCs, and for good reason: It's long been one of the finest tactical wargames available.

The convoluted military history of the latter half of our century now gets its due in Steel Panthers II: Modern Battles, and Gary Grigsby's design team earns wargamers' admiration all over again with this fine game.

The first scenario finds desperate American infantry in the path of a menacing North Korean armored advance in the dawning days of the Korean War. Jump through time to a final scenario that hypothesizes high-tech aggression between Russia and the Ukraine. In between are 50 scenarios with historical battles from Korea, Vietnam, the many and varied Arab-Israeli conflicts, border strife between Russia and China or Pakistan and India, the Falklands War, and Desert Storm. There's even a desert battle between Libya and French-supported Chad for Third World historians who remember Khaddafi's incursions in the '70s.

A comprehensive arsenal of modern armor is at your disposal.

For the more spèculative, there are hypothetical campaigns to be waged in modern-day China and Okinawa. An earth-shaking campaign postulates how World War III might have looked with a Soviet invasion of Germany in 1980.

Needless to say, it's a comprehensive list of modern combat. Some of the standout scenarios: the winter tank battle at the "Frozen" Chosin Reservoir, Korea, 1950; Ariel Sharon's assault at Chinese Farm, Egypt, 1973; the U.S. Marines' grim urban battle for Hue City, 1968; and the surprisingly intense firefight for the Kuwaiti International Airport, February 1991.

American helicopters provide advance scouting—and devastating gunship support—for armored columns.

The magnificent Steel Panthers engine is almost perfectly re-created, with a little cleaning up of the interface and a more attractive facelift. The Super VGA graphics are gorgeous, with attention paid to minute details of tanks, helicopters, and artillery pieces.

What's changed? The entire philosophy of land warfare. Beginning with the early Arab-Israeli tank duels, maneuverability and speed become the decisive factors in the outcomes of battles. The precision and effectiveness of artillery and airpower—never a significant factor in the World War II campaigns—make the employment of combined arms the order of the day.

Another huge difference is in the lethality of infantry. Back in the old Steel Panthers, the tank was truly king of the hill. But beginning in earnest around the early '60s, it becomes possible for lone infantrymen or small infantry antitank teams to knock out tanks all by their lonesomes. This makes life as a tanker very, very nerve-wracking. Now, the focus of infantry on assault is to provide up-front and flank support for armored advance, with the elimination of enemy antitank crews waiting in ambush to knock you out at the treads.

There's also a major extension of killing range—you don't have to be that close to kill your enemy anymore. Antitank teams smoke enemy vehicles from several screens away, significantly upping the danger ante.

It's too bad the original's multiplayer aspects were left unchanged—there's play by e-mail, but no modem or network support. SSI could have done better here.

Call in the Warthogs for a deadly rain on Iraqi armor.

As is, though, Modern Battles makes for a vastly more complex, sophisticated, and demanding battlefield than World War II required of Steel Panthers vets. With strong AI and a detailed map-and-scenario editor (with access to armies from over 40 countries), this game is a tactical wargamer's nirvana. For those who rip through all these scenarios and need seconds already, SSI will soon be rolling out an expansion disc with three new campaigns (including Korea 1998) and 29 scenarios.

**STEEL PANTHERS II: MODERN BATTLES**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | A |
| GETTING STARTED: | B+ |
| GRAPHICS: | B+ |
| SOUND CHECK: | B |
| MULTIPLAYER: | B- |

A- OVERALL

**With war this good, who needs peace?**

PUBLISHER: Strategic Simulations Inc. 800-601-7529 www.ssionline.com
PLATFORM: DOS CD
REQUIRES: 486/66, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, SVGA, mouse
RECOMMENDED: P75, 16MB RAM, sound card
STREET PRICE: $50

**TIPS**

▼ When shelling the enemy's advancing armor, lead his formation by five or six hexes and direct fire in a wide, impassable field. He'll have to take a beating to advance through your field of fire, and it saves you the trouble of pinpointing your attacks. ▼ Assault with infantry behind a smoke screen. As your men gain a few hexes each turn, push your smoke screen out to cover their advance. ▼ Move tanks in platoons of three, with one tank "walking point" and covering the other pair's advances. By leapfrogging this way, you can gain ground without exposing yourself to fire from unsuppressed enemy ground units.

# Trust

A secret shared.
A promise kept.
A heart opened.

Trust is the shiny jewel glistening
brightly in the rock of friendship.
Then, like any rock, it can be a powerful tool.

A blunt object that can be hammered against your allies'
unsuspecting, trusting skulls, against a monolithic church
and warring noble houses, against all that stands between
you and ultimate power as leader of the universe.
Trust is indeed a shiny jewel.

EMPEROR of the FADING SUNS™

A military strategy game in space.

SEGASOFT
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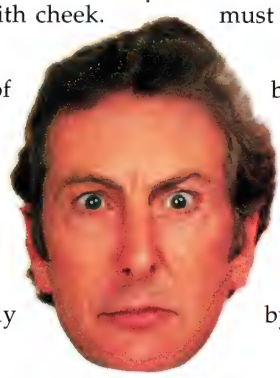
Microsoft Windows'95

TEEN T AGES 13+ ESRB

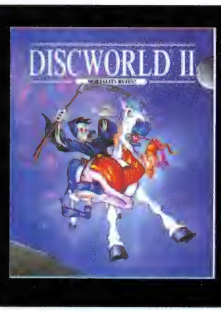
# Once upon a time, in an enchanted kingdom, there lived a big bosomed lady and some gerbils.

Enter a severely fractured fairy tale. Discworld® II: Mortality Bytes is the graphic adventure with cheek.

Over 100 hours of hilarious game-play immerse you in a bizarre realm where dozens of bawdy characters face life without Death. Yes, Death has gone on holiday. And the hapless magician Rincewind must find a way to restore order in the world. You'll be dazzled by 25,000 cells of hand-drawn animation. You'll be delighted by the fiendishly clever puzzles. You'll be deeply offended by the vocal stylings of Eric Idle. Discworld II: Mortality Bytes. It's magical. It's enchanting. It's sick.



[Discworld II features the voice of Eric Idle, former star of Monty-something-or-other.]




DISCWORLD® II

MORTALITY BYTES!

TEEN T AGES 13+ CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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PC CD ROM

PSYGNOSIS™

www.psygnosis.com

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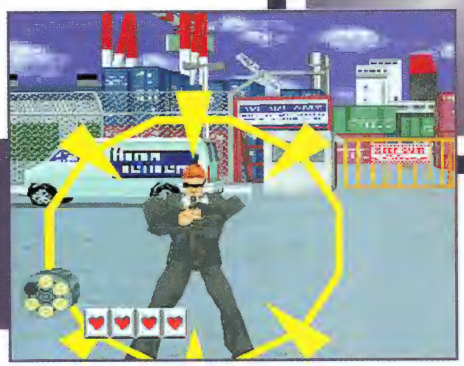
# Virtua Squad



The long arm—and long range—of the law.

Virtua what? This is the new incarnation of Virtua Cop—the more familiar name couldn't be used after legal wranglings. And if you ever plugged quarters into the arcade game to waste the criminal denizens of Virtua City, you know all about this exquisite 3D shoot-'em-up.

The 3D graphics are truly impressive—comparable to the coin-op—and play at good speed. The gameplay is also identical; gunplay gets downright hectic, particularly on the Hard setting, with power-up weapons to snag and those pesky hostages to shoot around. Playing with a buddy clears screens faster but leads to the inevitable squabble over territorial rights for the few power-ups.

*The goons get the broomstick*

The action never gets monotonous, thanks to a decent variety of sight gags. You have to blast a bad guy in the driver's seat of a dump truck before he runs you over, and there's a great bit where a gunman holds two women in front of him as shields. You have to hold your fire for a too-tense moment until the women duck, giving you a shot at the stooge's head—if you've got the nerve to take it.

Only one giant problem stands between Virtua Squad and top-drawer gamedom: It's astonishingly short. Once you learn to anticipate some of the traps thrown your way, solving the game at the Normal difficulty setting should take just one day. Without adding lives or continues, I beat the game at Normal in about 45 minutes. Luckily, the Hard setting can't be conquered as briskly, but the surprises are gone because the levels and layouts are all the same.

My stressful nature lends itself to mowing down goons for a few minutes every day, so I'm glad Virtua Squad is lying around. But that's therapy, not challenge. Virtua Squad is good catharsis, but not much else. *—Daniel Morris*

**VIRTUA SQUAD**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | B |
| GETTING STARTED: | A |
| GRAPHICS: | A- |
| SOUND CHECK: | B |
| MULTIPLAYER: | B |

**B** OVERALL

**A topnotch port of Virtua Cop, but thin on staying power.**

DEVELOPER: AM2
PUBLISHER: SegaSoft
888-734-2725
www.segasoft.com
PLATFORM: Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: P75, 16MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, sound card
STREET PRICE: $44.95

# Heroes Of Might & Magic II: The Succession Wars

*Plays great, more filling*

The Necromancer's castle is never a bright and cheery place to visit.

Heroes Of Might & Magic was on everyone's list as one of the best games of 1995. Now, its sequel, The Succession Wars, has arrived, and while it doesn't boast enough new features to blow us away like its predecessor, it still marks an improvement on what was already an outstanding strategy game.

Lord Ironfist gained control of the Kingdom of Enroth in the first installment. Now, after 25 years of peaceful reign, Ironfist is dead, there is civil war, and his two sons—Archibald (the good one) and Roland (the evil one)—are vying for the throne. You choose which son to help, and with cunning and an army, attempt to regain control of the kingdom.

It's a turn-based battle for territory and resources. You must fight up to five enemy warlords at a time to conquer new lands, gather resources and artifacts, and take over towns. Heroes and the armies they muster are recruited to your cause. Point and click your way to victory—or defeat.

Two new hero types (raising the total to six) are introduced this time around: the Wizard and the Necromancer. The latter is particularly cool, as he has the ability to raise the souls of the dead and enlist them in your army. The battlefields are also larger—up to four times bigger than the original's—and there are new creatures to fight with and against. Also, many of the creatures you recruit for your army can now be upgraded into even nastier monsters. For eye candy, the creatures now have more animation on the battlefield, which truly enhances the drama.

If you lust for battle against other humans, modem, TCP/IP internet, and network connections are supported for up to six players at a time.—*Steve Klett*

**HEROES OF MIGHT & MAGIC II**

| | |
|---|---|
| GAMEPLAY: | B+ |
| GETTING STARTED: | A |
| GRAPHICS: | B+ |
| SOUND CHECK: | B+ |
| MULTIPLAYER: | B |

**B+** OVERALL

**A great game made better.**

DEVELOPER: New World Computing
PUBLISHER: 3DO
800-336-3506
www.3do.com
PLATFORM: DOS/Win 95 CD
REQUIRES: 486/66, 8MB RAM, 2X CD-ROM drive, SVGA, mouse
RECOMMENDED: sound card
STREET PRICE: $49.99

# THINK ONLY THE STRONG SURVIVE? THINK AGAIN!

## AND AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN

# DEUS

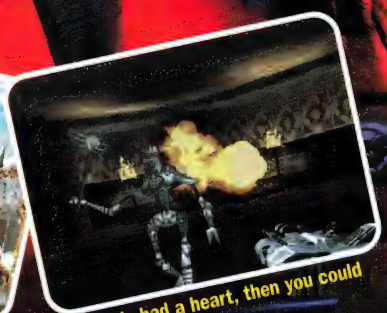
Introducing DEUS, the 3D role-playing game that requires both brains and brawn.

- Your Identity: 22nd century bounty hunter
- Your Goal: save the scientific community on the planet Alcibiade from terrorists
- Your Obstacles: 40 predators; 5 lunatic terrorists; mind-bending puzzles; your own life parameters (health, energy, food)
- Your Strategy: Kill. eat. Kill. sleep. Kill. tend wounds. Kill...
- Your Weapons: anything from spears to rocket launchers
- Your Bonus: 2 play modes - role playing and arcade

Don't joke about his height or he'll bash in your kneecaps.

Amputation, just what the doctor ordered.

On second thought, maybe you shouldn't have skinned her babies.



If he only had a heart, then you could rip it out.

**Website:**
**http://www.readysoft.com**

READYSOFT

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Silmarils

# Civilization II Scenarios

I can't even describe how excited I was to get my hands on Civilization II Scenarios. From the start, I knew what had to be done: I had to wipe the Hodads, a miscreant alien race intent on destroying mankind, off the face of the planet. That's just one of the new and very different scenarios included in this compelling add-on pack.

*More conquests*

Civ II Scenarios hits hard, with 12 new scenarios developed by the creators of Civ II and 8 "Best of the Net" scenarios created by Civ II players like you and me. Contained within these scenarios are new musical scores and new unit types. The level of challenge is great, ranging from an easy "American Civil War" to a daunting "After the Apocalypse."

It's really this simple: If you enjoyed Civ II—and who didn't?—then Scenarios is a must-buy.

*—Nash Werner*

PUBLISHER: MicroProse 800-695-4263 www.microprose.com
PLATFORM: Win/Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: $29

B+ OVERALL

# Scrabble

Quick—what's the best multiplayer computer game? Quake? No. Duke? No. Definitely Scrabble.

As proof of its popularity, our game lab was crowded by Scrabble lovers and haters alike from the day the game was installed. I was helped along as I battled the computer opponent, Maven, by my friends shouting from the sidelines. Besides being exactly like the board game, this version's pace was very fast when playing against Maven at the expert settings. Rather than accept being defeated each time, we used the hints section liberally and actually won several times—albeit using the most obscure and marginal words that only a computer would know.

*Classic wordplay*

Unfortunately, when playing against a human opponent, you only have the option to set a time limit of 25 minutes a turn, which is much too long to wait to play. However, that's a minor quibble and doesn't detract too much from the fun—especially if you use the time to hassle your opponent. You can also pit your word skills against one remote opponent over a modem or three other players over a network or on the Internet. A word lister, definitions, and hint guide help to arbitrate heated conflicts.

For me, the word is definitely mightier than the nailgun. *—Joy J. Ma*

PUBLISHER: Hasbro Interactive 508-921-3700 www.hasbro.com
PLATFORM: Win 95/Mac CD
STREET PRICE: $39.99

B+ OVERALL

# Fighter Duel: Special Edition

If head-to-head multiplayer air combat with the cream of World War II fighters is what wanna-be aces are looking for, Fighter Duel: Special Edition is a fun ride, though single-player pilots will be sorely disappointed.

*For Net aces only*

Why? Only in some ragged developer's dreams will an A6M2 Zero outclimb and outdive a BF-109K. No way, no how. Philips says it tweaked the AI to make computer pilots harder to beat, especially on faster machines, but this is ridiculous. Cockpit controls don't change between aircraft, and neither does the obvious performance.

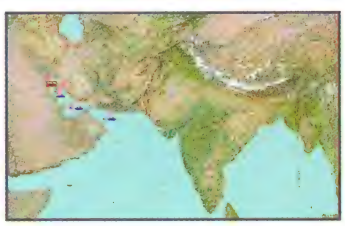
What Fighter Duel does have is a viable nine-person network-play option to complement two-player modem matches and three extra Zero models. More joystick support and improved calibration, realistic flight effects, and a two-player in-flight radio are added, and keyboard bugs are fixed.

Since most players won't have a clue about the flight characteristics of their mounts, it probably doesn't make much of a difference. But accurate aircraft performance becomes less important when the main goal is to beat the human adversary on the other side. *—George T. Chronis*

PUBLISHER: Philips Media 800-340-7888 www.philipsmedia.com
PLATFORM: DOS
STREET PRICE: $49.99

B OVERALL

# Harpoon Classic '97



Harpooners now get to enjoy an attractive new version of the PC's most advanced, comprehensive naval simulation ever.

Gameplay is basically intact, with a slightly more intuitive interface and stepped-up tutorial help. Of course, hardcore Harpooners pride themselves on their mastery of the naval arcana needed to excel, and will find their rewards waiting here among hundreds of military platforms.

*Old sailors never die*

The new battle sets and scenarios also up the ante on the diplomatic and territorial subtleties. You can choose to play a scenario involving intricate gunboat diplomacy, or go full-bore for the theoretical NATO-Warsaw Pact conflagration that seems consigned forever to simulations only.

Luckily, Harpoon Online provides desktop commanders with all they need to fight it out via modem. And I-Magic's Web site provides a great chat area, the Harpoon Academy.

The maps are now in bold color with accurate topographical detail. You can now move the windows around the desktop and tailor your "bridge" to your liking.

If the thick Harpoon manuals scared you away from this wargame, the '97 edition is easier to use (and prettier to look at). *—Daniel Morris*

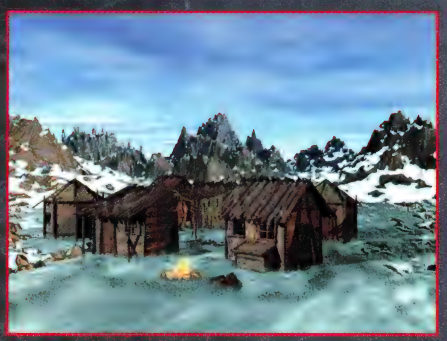
PUBLISHER: I-Magic 800-789-1534 www.imagicgames.com
PLATFORM: Win/Win 95 CD
STREET PRICE: $49.95

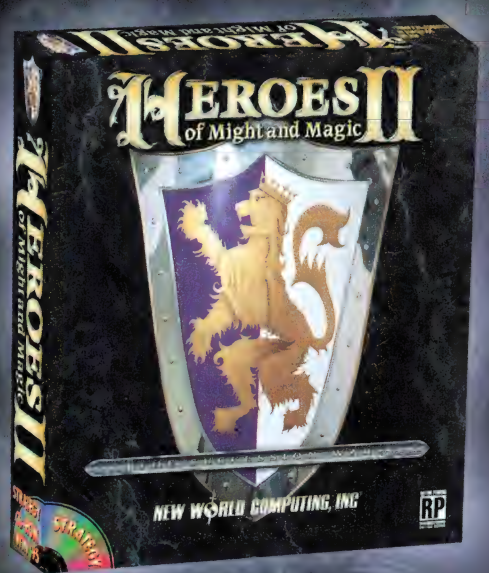
B OVERALL

# THE SEQUEL TO *Heroes of Might and Magic,*®

# TAKE A STAB AT THE ROYAL THRONE

The king is dead, a civil war rages throughout the countryside, and the people are clamoring for a new leader. Whether you choose to play on the side of good or evil, you can control the greater kingdom if you can muster the courage and skill to take it. This long-awaited sequel is a feature-by-feature enhancement of everything that made the original Heroes an all-time strategy classic. Scores of new hero and monster types, alliance formation for team play, enlarged combat maps, increased multi-player options, and a flexible "World Builder" module are just a few of the reasons why Heroes II will be a prized addition to your CD-ROM treasure trove.






- *Form alliances with friends or the computer.*
- *Multiplayer action for 2-6 players via Internet, modem, or network.*
- *Expanded "interactive" battlefields.*
- *More of everything! Over 60 scenarios, 65 heroes, and 66 monsters. Dozens of new skills, spells and artifacts.*
- *Includes powerful "World Builder" game editor.*
- *Available for Windows® 95 and DOS.*

THE 1995 STRATEGY GAME OF THE YEAR – Computer Gaming World
CG RATED
Computer Gaming World
COMPUTER PLAYER CP RECOMMENDED!
Computer Player
"Heroes of Might and Magic II is clearly one of the best strategy games of this year – or any other year, for that matter." – PC Gamer
HEROES II
of Might and Magic™
THE SUCCESSION WARS
For more information call 1-800-251-9664
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STUDIO 3DO
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# SYNDICATE WARS

*Serve the Corporation*

By Rob Smith

**Struggling with the zealots, the Unguided, and various punks wandering the streets of the world's major cities? Here are a few pointers to help you through the early missions—and to maintain the Corporation's control.**

## General Tips

Band all your agents together and target one group at a time, especially in the early missions. Focus on that enemy until they have fallen.

Equip your starting agents with miniguns and sell the Uzis. Pick up Uzis from dead bodies and then sell them to maintain an early cash flow.

On any mission where a bank is mentioned, go into it. Banks have money, and this will allow you to buy better supplies and agent upgrades early on.

When your agents are grouped together in an open area, make sure they have a line of sight to shoot at enemies. If you attack head-on, just your front agent will fire and be fired on, putting him at greater risk of being killed.

With that, let's go to the missions. London is a breeze, so we'll bypass it.

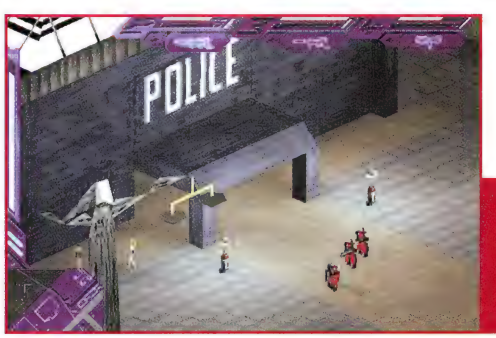
## 1. Detroit

Once through the barricade to the Church base, stay away from the gun turret on the left. Apart from inflicting severe damage, it will explode.

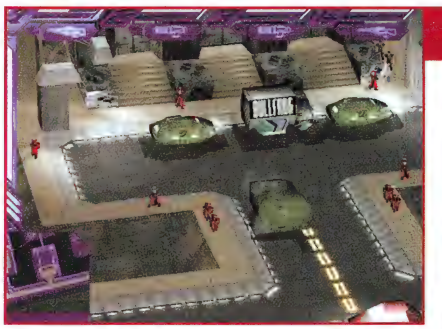
A lone female punk around the back of one building carries a high explosive. Kill her and grab it before it toasts your agents.

## 2. Hong Kong

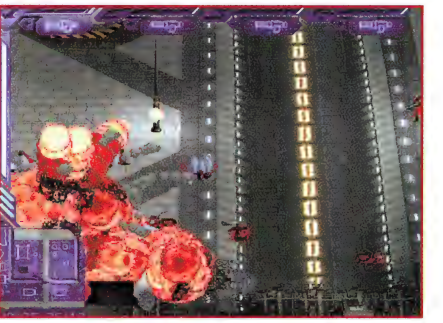
Make sure that you have a Persuadatron to persuade the scientists. Only get involved in the firefight right outside the IML if you have Knockout gas to make swift work of these heavily armed agents. You'll have to confront them eventually, though, to get the car so you can retrieve the technicians.




**Be wary of police stations—unnecessary firefights should be avoided.**



4. Singapore



6. Rome

## 2. Beijing

Persuade the scientists and shoot/persuade any citizens and enemy agents along the way. There are no major obstacles. Move up along the ridge to the training camp and take out the guards. There aren't many.

## 3. Geneva

Be wary of a large assault by the Unguided as you approach the two scientists. Make sure the firefight takes place outside to avoid endangering the scientists. Some cash is available from an executive being protected by bodyguards just north of the Lab.

## 3. Vancouver

An early punk attack straight out of the IML is the only major barrier to getting the scientists and then getting out.

## 3. Matochkin Shar

To reach the scientists, you'll have to bring down the gates by force—use a car or high explosive. If you have the time, or feel like wandering around, there's another fight going on with a truck containing cash.

## 4. Singapore

Near the IML, send one agent to kill the guard and get his Long-Range Rifle. There is another guard around the side of the same building—kill him for another LR Rifle. Walk west with two agents armed with the LRs, and pick off two guards; they're easy targets when they're standing still, but keep the mouse over them if they move or you'll waste a shot. Once you've sniped the guards, run back to the rest of the gang. Some more guards will follow, but they can be taken out.

Return and waste the remaining guards, and make sure you kill those around the right side of the bank. Check out the bank for cash. The large, center Bullfrog van is what you're after. Drive it to the rendezvous point for a simple completion.

## 5. Phoenix

There's a bank. That means cash. There are also loads of punks and zealots to shoot. Knockout gas could be useful—send one agent in with the canister, then retreat and fill the stunned figures with lead. Electron Maces can be grabbed from some attackers.

Fighting in the church is difficult, so stand outside and pick off the enemies coming out.

## 6. Rome

Watch the fireworks from the air strike after the initial attack on the punks. Keep out of the blast radius. Make sure the agents are grouped to target all weapons on the Spider Droids, which can be deadly. The rest of the instructions: just kill everyone.

## 7. Hong Kong

The only car available, and the one that you need, is over on the east side of the city. Once you've persuaded the agent, move out of the area fast, or witness the pyrotechnic display of an air strike.

## 7. Phoenix

A vehicle is in the southwest corner, but it's teeming with punks, and there are some high explosives to contend with. It may be easier just to take out the agent with an LR Rifle.

## 7. Beijing

The agent is in the old training camp. A heavy ambush awaits, so start firing. Beware of drive-by shootings around the center of town. By now, you should have accumulated enough cash to be heavily armed.

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# MechWarrior 2: Mercenaries

Edited by Rob Smith

**In our December issue, we went straight to the source to bring you the greatest mission-solving tactics courtesy of Mercenaries' lead designer. Now, we've got some more insider info, with the scoop on network play tactics and armory suggestions from Mercenaries' producers. For tips on slagging your enemies, read on...**

## Favorite Mechs

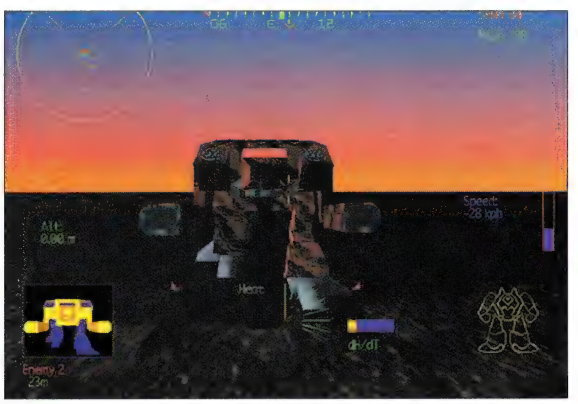
**Clans:** LOKI (Hellbringer), MADCAT (Timberwolf), BLACKHAWK (Nova)
**Inner Sphere:** JENNER (surprisingly effective), ATLAS (100 tons o' fun), HIGHLANDER (yeah, it's the name)

## General Mercs Management Strategy

Get three Atlases equipped with Jump Jets, 6+ Medium Lasers, some Infernos, some Streak SRM 2s, AMS (a must), and ammo. One or two ER Large Lasers are good for enemy turret removal.

Best Weapons: Medium Lasers (as many as your Mech can hold). Buy all the Medium Lasers between each mission; you'll need 'em to replace the ones you lost in battle.

Upgrade that armor ASAP. And add Heat Sinks to your Mech's arms ASAP.



## Network Strategy

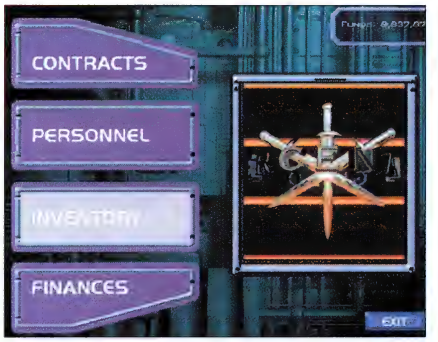
When starting, get good armor. Check the armor statistics on each Mech as you cycle through the choices.

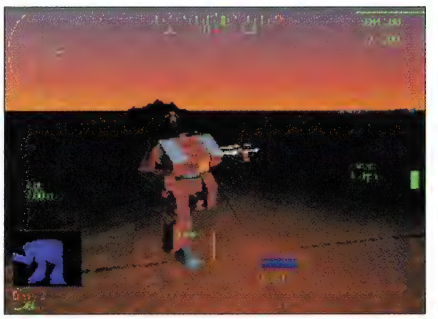
For weapons, if unlimited ammo is an option, a Mech with lots of auto-cannons is always a good choice (look at the Direwolf variants). If ammo is limited but heat tracking is off, try a Mech with lots of lasers, such as a Nova. The points per hit on lasers are not all that high, but fired in unison, they're a formidable weapon. (When grouped to target an opponent's legs, they soon put him out of action.) You can press semicolon to fire all weapons simultaneously.

When you need accuracy, we recommend missiles such as LRMs or Streak SRMs, because they lock onto their targets. If you suspect your opponents are going to use guided missiles against you, consider using a Mech with an Anti-Missile System (AMS).

Don't stand still, or you'll fry. Master the torso-twist to be much more effective. For the uninitiated, the torso-twist is the act of turning your turret and firing in a direction that is independent of the direction you are moving.

Some of the best players here at Activision use a mouse as their primary input device. However, the keyboard is also useful, because it keeps the advanced Jump-Jet controls and regular controls easily accessible.



Choosing a Mech equipped with Jump Jets gives you the ability to dodge missiles and PPCs. By using the advanced Jump-Jet controls, it's possible to slide left and right to dodge incoming ballistics (use the Insert and Page Up keys). Jumping over them is also a possibility.

In combat with another Mech, home in on a specific area with your shots. Parts will blow off faster if you concentrate your fire. In particular, if you can destroy the head or take off a leg, you will have essentially disabled your opponent.

If you are playing with radar enabled, you can hide from your opponents by shutting down. Of course, they will be warned as soon as you begin your power-up sequence, so there is a risk you'll be pegged before you get a chance to fire.

## Last Notes

Look for Merc producer Tim Morten on Activision's Internet game server in the Luthien 4 sector. That's him in the LOKI (Hellbringer). While you're there, be sure to listen to the pages in the Starport ("Kick some clan ass, make a ton of cash").

*(Thanks to producer Tim Morten and associate producer Matt Chandler for their assistance with setting you straight in Mech multiplayer.)*

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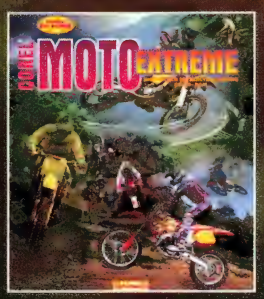


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# STRATEGY & TACTICS CHEATS

**This is it. They're coming—bigger, stronger, deadlier than you thought possible. Scarier than you ever imagined. It's...this month's game cheats! And they're lookin' good: Bow before the superior might of these Eradicator codes. Bash, crash, and burn through the fury of Slamscape. Save a shattered world in SkyNET. Lead the field in Triple Play. Win the mighty Syndicate Wars. What more could you ask for?**

## Eradicator

*Enter these codes during gameplay (typing \ before each one):*

**\RAGAMUFFIN:** Invincibility.

**\BLOAD:** Load a specific level.

**\VICI:** Complete the current level.

**\FMK:** Full health.

**\GIFT:** Get all inventory items.

**\ARMS:** Get all ammo.

**\OVERDRIVE:** Power-up microchip.

**\SPUTNIK:** Full map.

**\AMOBJECT:** Show objects in the automap.

**\GOBBET:** Gib yourself.

**\AIMOVE:** Toggle enemy AI.

**\DIG:** Clipping on/off.

**\FRAME:** Display frame rate.

## SkyNET

*Type these cheats during gameplay:*

**SUPERUZI:** Gives you lots of ammo for a megauzi.

**ARNOLD:** Get all weapons, though not all ammo.

**SURGERY:** Full health and armor.

**NITROUS:** Speeds up game.

**ILLBEBACK:** Jump to next level.

**JOYCAM:** Switches to third-person perspective. (Only works in multiplayer games, and if you're using a joystick.)

**COUNTERS:** Shows game counters.

## Triple Play '97

*At the Select Stadium screen, enter these key combos:*

**Up, Down, Right, Up, Down, Left, Up:** Lets you play in a cornfield.

**Right, Left, Up, Left, Down, Right, Left:** Lets you play in the mystery stadium.

*During gameplay, hold down the 1 key while doing one of the following:*

Hold 2 for a long fly ball.

Hold 3 for a line drive.

Hold 4 for a grounder.

Hold 5 for a pop-up.

Hold 6 for a bunt.

(e.g., hold 1 and 2 for a long fly ball)

Hold 7 with any of the above hits to get a full-power hit.

(e.g., hold 1, 2, and 7 for a sure home run, 1, 6, and 7 for a monster bunt, etc.)

## Syndicate Wars

*To use the cheats:*

At the game's log-in prompt, type **POOSLICE.** You should hear a tone indicating the cheats are active.

Now, from within the game, type:

**Shift-Q:** Get all weapons.

**Alt-C:** Win the mission and move on.

## SlamScape

*From within a level, type these codes:*

**SHAZAM:** Invincibility.

**KABLASTROPHE:** Full power-up.

**CREDITS:** Show game credits.

Is a certain game driving you nuts? Can't figure out how to kill an enemy, solve a puzzle, or find a key? We can help! Send your cheat-code requests to:

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*PC Games snags one of the first MMX machines—and we think you'll like what we saw.*

# MMX Enters the Real World

*By David Gerding*

Hardcore gamers have been awaiting the arrival of MMX technology for about a year now. For those who have been engrossed in too many Quake deathmatches and reading far too little of the game press, MMX is Intel Corp.'s technology that supposedly turns Pentium chips into multimedia powerhouses.

Rebel Moon Rising

In brief, MMX works by performing operations on more than one piece of data—up to eight pieces, actually—in one "clock cycle" of the CPU. In theory, that means certain software routines will run up to eight times faster.

Some bad news arrived in late November, when a business computer magazine discovered that a company had sent it an MMX-equipped machine "by mistake." The benchmark numbers didn't seem nearly as exciting as what Intel had been promising. The 200 MHz MMX chip ("Pentium with MMX technology" in Intel's clunky parlance) was only turning in performance about 20 percent better than a standard 200 MHz when using standard applications and benchmarks.

In fact, the 20 percent increase is likely due to cache improvements found in MMX-enabled chips and has nothing to do with MMX code. But a 20 percent increase at the same clock speed is nothing to sneeze at, and the important issue that was mostly ignored in these early reports is that MMX requires code to be written specifically for it to see any serious improvements.

*PC Games* got its hands on one of the earliest MMX models and ran four game titles designed to exploit MMX power. These aren't reviews of the games per se, but rather a look at their technology. Each did much better than a mere 20 percent increase in speed. In fact, these titles showed performance gains as high as 300 percent. Was MMX worth the wait? You be the judge.

## Palettes, Resolution, And Effects

Of all the titles under the microscope, Rebel Moon Rising provided the clearest sense of the power delivered by an MMX Pentium. On a lunar colony seeking independence, players control lunar militiamen fighting the oppressive United Nations Earth forces in this sci-fi first-person shooter.

The most noticeable aspect of Rebel Moon Rising is the colors—more specifically, the dazzling abundance of them. Now, think about this: The routines used in most first-person shooters such as Quake and Duke are near-perfect for MMX optimization. Could it be that Intel was actually listening to the game-development crowd?

The result? While most of the popular engines out there default to lower resolutions like 320-by-200 in 8-bit color, Rebel Moon Rising with MMX optimization delivers fast gameplay at 640-by-480 in 16-bit color—which means a brilliant 32,000-color palette.

Developer Fenris Wolf put these extra colors to good use, using MMX optimizations to deliver copious lighting effects both in the backgrounds and in the gameplay. Fire off a laser round, and the pulse disappears into the distance, casting a glow off nearby floors and walls as it goes. Certain robots emit a glow that can actually be useful to players: You can figure out the relative position of an unseen robot before it even enters the room by watching the ambient light it throws as it moves.

The larger color palette makes it difficult to see much difference between the resolution modes because human eyes perceive the color as additional resolution information. In an MMX-based world, 640-by-480 in 32,000 colors is likely to become a popular default resolution for game designers—meaning great full-screen play for many games.

Most interesting to computer gamers is a handy benchmarking feature that provides frame rates in the game's various supported resolutions with MMX turned on or off (see table). The results are obvious: With the MMX accelerations on, the engine consistently delivered about 300 percent more frames per second.

While the actual frame rate naturally dropped as screen resolution was raised, the relative improvement versus the non-MMX code actually

| Resolution | Frame Rate w/ MMX On | Frame Rate w/ MMX Off | Approximate Improvement |
|---|---|---|---|
| 640-by-480 | 20 | 6.5 | 300% |
| 800-by-600 | 14.5 | 4.3 | 337% |
| 1024-by-768 | 9.5 | 2.6 | 365% |

*Source: informal benchmark using Rebel Moon Rising benchmarks

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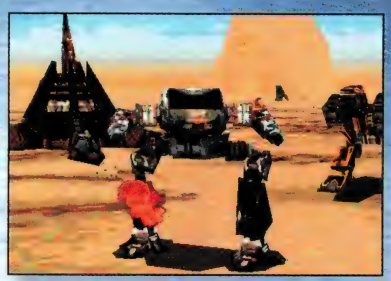

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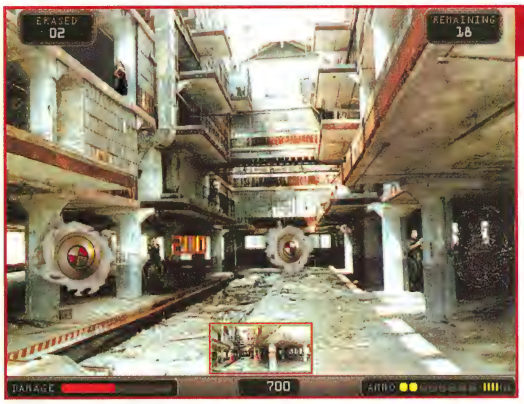


Eraser

increased. This curious effect is the result of the larger screen resolution affording greater opportunities for optimizations per frame. Although most gamers probably wouldn't want to play in the highest-resolution mode, even on an MMX machine, they could if they wanted to at frame rates considered acceptable only at much lower resolutions a few years ago.

Conclusion: The first-person shooters out there are going to get much-needed facelifts—and speed improvements—when they make the transition to MMX.

## The Return of Full-Motion Video

While many critics have been shunning games that emphasize full-motion video (FMV), MMX may give FMV a new life in the hardcore game community.

A while back, Intel released its latest Indeo Video Interactive (IVI) compression technology. Mostly overlooked by the game development community, this latest Indeo standard includes "hooks" and technologies designed specifically for the game programmer, including the ability to handle multiple video sprites and to allow the stream of video to "branch" in real time without a lot of extra work on the part of the programmer. The latest version of IVI is optimized for MMX, which was apparently the intention for IVI all along.

Developer Imagination Pilots has consistently turned out some of the best FMV games, and the MMX-accelerated version of Eraser: Turnabout is a sequel that picks up where the movie left off. The title will play on non-MMX-powered machines—just not as well.

FMV titles aren't for everyone. Typically, that's because they're not as interactive as they are billed to be. Players watch video, wait, make a choice, then watch more video. However, Eraser: Turnabout uses MMX to keep the video moving, even during the traditionally jarring "decision" screens in these games. The shooting-gallery sequences of Turnabout may actually appeal to twitch fans, because the video sprites are fast and plentiful.

One of the more impressive uses of MMX technology comes in the end sequences of the game. Video sprite characters that are controllable and dynamic move in front of a moving video background. It takes a lot of processing power to merge two independent video streams like this in real time, and MMX seems to make short work of it.

Immersive image environment techniques like QuickTime VR are also ripe for MMX acceleration. And yes, MMX-enabled software MPEG players will eventually appear to improve the playback quality of all those "art" clips Web aces have been pulling off the Internet.

Conclusion: Expect video, the veritable black sheep of game design, to stage a comeback.

## 3D Power

Sure, video and higher resolutions are good—but what about 3D?

UbiSoft's Pod, the game bundled with many of the early MMX systems, is likely to be the first MMX game experience for many game players.

DeathDrome

Pod proves that developers don't need 3D hardware to deliver fast, high-res 3D graphics.

Pod is a racing game set in the last desperate days of a distant planet, and the abundant use of textures makes this world come to life. If a Pentium already has a hardware accelerator—Virge and ATI Rage are supported so far—players get the combined effects of hardware acceleration and MMX optimization. A very compelling glimpse of gaming's future, indeed.

Great details made possible by the MMX technology include the smoke and tire-track effects visible off the cars in view on the screen. On more than one track, dramatic lens flares appear on the windshield whenever a player's car heads toward the sun.

Pod

Sure, there will be a non-MMX version of Pod available sometime next April, but gamers will need a 3D hardware accelerator to appreciate it. With MMX, all that's needed is a plain-vanilla graphics accelerator.

Another 3D combat racer we checked out was Zipper's DeathDrome. DeathDrome has been out for a while, waiting for MMX machines to arrive to take advantage of the MMX optimizations latent in the code. On non-MMX machines, the game relies on hardware acceleration to deliver good speed at the higher resolutions. With MMX? You guessed it: faster performance.

## The Future

As with any new technology, it will take time for programmers to figure out how to fully exploit MMX. Fortunately, with more and more programming libraries like DirectX being used by game designers, we're likely to see all sorts of games speed up in the months ahead as the drivers on which these games depend on become MMX-optimized.

That means that many Windows 95 games are likely to show significant improvements in the coming year, even those not specifically designed to support MMX. As 3D hardware and the new hardware-accelerated sound boards make it into MMX systems, the combined power of all that hardware will deliver speed and resolution most of us only dreamed about a couple of years ago.

# Three Sound Cards, Three Philosophies

**Diamond's AWE 64 board is a DirectSound 3D update of its AWE 32.**

Computer audio is in a state of transition. Just as Microsoft's DirectX development tools are motivating a lot of action in graphics board development, DirectSound and DirectSound 3D support is influencing many of the sound board designs just hitting the streets.

Sound vendors are also beginning to wrangle with questions such as whether to jump on the PCI bus bandwagon, so hardware and software features in brand-new cards can vary greatly. Exhibiting three very different philosophies are new high-end sound boards from Creative Labs, Diamond Multimedia, and Guillemot (distributed by Ubi Soft).

Creative's $249 **Sound Blaster AWE 64 Gold** is a transitional product that adds new features but doesn't stray too far from the past. This plug-and-play ISA card features DirectSound and DirectSound 3D support, between 4MB and 28MB of RAM, and 20-bit S/PDIF digital sampling for 64-voice MIDI and 44.1kHz output.

"Our goal was to build on the AWE 32 and make it better," says Creative training specialist Steven Conrardy. "We shrunk the number of chips down to two and bumped the RAM up to 4MB."

Looking to make a leap ahead of the competition is Diamond with its PCI-based **Freedom 5600** board. Diamond believes ISA technology limits the number of audio streams to one, while it is building support for up to 24 independent streams in the Freedom 5600, says Don Spencer, Diamond's director of audio engineering.

This is important, he says, because Diamond will also support DirectSound and DirectSound 3D.

"Uniform APIs are becoming more important to consumers, and as a result, to developers," he says. "It's important for us to adapt to them as quickly as possible. These APIs support multi-stream processing, and using PCI is critical in getting more quality.

"Not only can this card support up to four-speaker surround sound, but it also gives game developers the opportunity to separate distinct sound effects with a lot more clarity within a virtual environment."

Spencer says it's still too early to reveal other specifics of the board, or its estimated price.

Taking a completely different angle on what sound quality is all about, Guillemot decided the **MaxiSound 64 PnP** card is what musicians and computer gamers need for more control over recorded sounds.

The result is another 4MB ISA board that offers computer gamers some intriguing options.

Rather than appeal to all of the latest API sets—only DirectSound is supported—the MaxiSound provides four-channel sound, 64-voice MIDI like the new Sound Blaster card, but adds a fully-featured software editing board that can create complete individual sound-effects sets that can be applied to different games.

At the recent COMDEX convention in Las Vegas, Guillemot representatives sampled the sound on Wing Commander IV, and then built a sound-effects set to accentuate the music and sound tracks—creating a much more cinematic experience in the process. *—George T. Chronis*

## PC GamePad Pro

**RATING: A-**

Advanced Gravis is upping its ante in the bid for dominance in the PC gamepad market with its PC GamePad Pro, set to compete against Microsoft's SideWinder GamePad and Pro Joystick (and offering DOS-backward compatibility from Windows 95, something the SideWinder has had problems doing).

The GamePad Pro has 10 buttons programmed in a painless Win 95 interface, plus a built-in Y-cable, and it's fully compatible with the GrIP system. It's truly a plug-and-play peripheral: we got it installed and running out of the box in minutes. So far, we've had no trouble configuring for games, programming buttons, or getting compatibility with DOS games.

Gravis has been careful to address the desires of DOS gamers who have had problems getting their DOS titles to cooperate with the Win 95 environment. Peripheral support has been one of the chief stumbling blocks, and Gravis hopes its GamePad Pro's easy cross-OS compatibility can give it a winning edge over the excellent SideWinder pad.

For gamers addicted to the GrIP, the GamePad Pro is a must-have. It's worth picking up just for multiplayer sports titles, and the included Y-cable is a considerate bonus for those who haven't sprung for the GrIP just yet. At $34.95 (roughly what the SideWinder costs), this could lead to an interesting showdown between the industry's leading peripheral maker and the software giant looking to flex its substantial muscles in the gamepad market. (Advanced Gravis; 604-431-5020; www.gravis.com; $34.95)

*—Daniel Morris*

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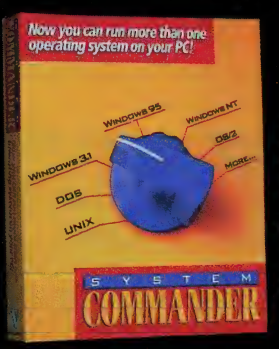


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# Eaglemax

**RATING: C**

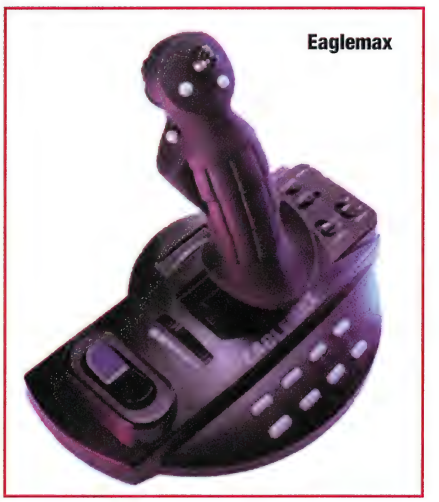
Eaglemax's promotional materials billed it as "the joystick Microsoft and ThrustMaster don't want you to know about." Okay, we were intrigued... but the Eaglemax wasn't quite the answer to all our prayers.

It looks and feels cheap. Everything is very light in your hand, and the buttons and trigger are made of questionable plastic (a colleague's succinct appraisal—"kludge"). The hat switch is very loose and clicky.

On the plus side, ACT Labs' slick, simple programmability is very welcome. Four macros can be programmed, and a setup on/off toggle allows you to reconfigure in a game without quitting out of it.

Compatibility doesn't seem to be a problem, either. Eaglemax was compatible with all the joystick standards of 1996 (many times by selecting "Microsoft SideWinder" in the Windows Control Panel), and configuration was never a hurdle.

Eaglemax may appeal to gamers with a desire for souped-up programmability in their stick, but it won't be remaining on my desktop. (ACT Laboratories; 604-278-3650; www.actlab.com/game gear; $59.95) *—Daniel Morris*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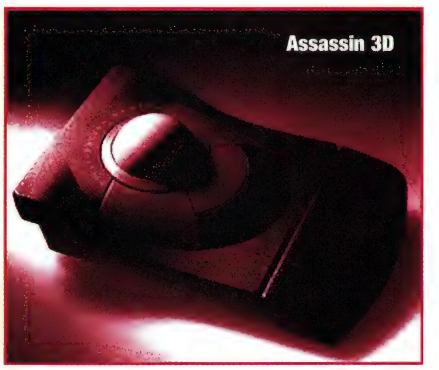

Assassin 3D

# Assassin 3D

**RATING: B+**

Arguments over the best way to play Duke or Quake—mouse or keyboard—have been raging for many months now. They're still going strong, but if you can ignore the opinions of the input-device Nazis, there's definitely room for the Assassin 3D trackball.

This $99.95 peripheral ($49.95 if ordered from **www.fpgaming.com**) takes some getting used to, but it does offer some distinct advantages in the old run-and-shoot offense. First off, this three-button trackball must be used with a joystick—generic, Thrustmaster, and CH Products configurations are supported. If you can adapt to the idea of using the joystick for forward and backward movement and the Assassin for pivoting left and right, this setup can speed up movement and target acquisition while still feeling fluid and natural.

Big DOS hits such as Duke and Quake are supported, but expect some extra configuration hurdles with less-popular games. Windows 95 is not supported at this time. (First-Person Gaming; 510-264-9577; $99.95 list, $49.95 through FPG Web site.) *—George T. Chronis*

## Gaming Hardware Hall of Fame

**Wondering what hardware to buy to get the best game machine for your money? It's easy. Just check *PC Games*' running list of our top hardware recommendations. Each month, we'll update the Hall of Fame as we review new products.**

| CATEGORY | PRODUCT | DETAILS | OUR RATING |
|---|---|---|---|
| PC | Falcon Mach V | Falcon Northwest; 800-258-6778; approx. $4,000 | A |
| Monitor | Nokia Valugraph 447L | Nokia; 800-296-6542; $699 | B+ |
| CD-ROM drive | Toshiba TXM3501E1 | Toshiba; 714-457-0777; price not available | B+ |
| Sound card | AWE32 | Creative Labs; 800-998-5227; $249.95 | A |
| Speakers | SoundWorks | Cambridge SoundWorks; 800-367-4434; $219 | A+ |
| Joystick | F-16 Combatstick | CH Products; 619-598-2518; $69.95 | A+ |
| Gamepad | SideWinder gamepad | Microsoft; 206-882-8080; $39 | A+ |
| Modem | Supra 28.8 | Supra; 800-727-8772; $219 internal, $299 external | A |
| Graphics card | Screamin' 3D | Sierra; 800-757-7707; $199 | A |
| Key add-on | NEC MultiSync M700 monitor | NEC; 800-632-4636; $899 | A- |

# TECHNOBABBLE S.O.S.

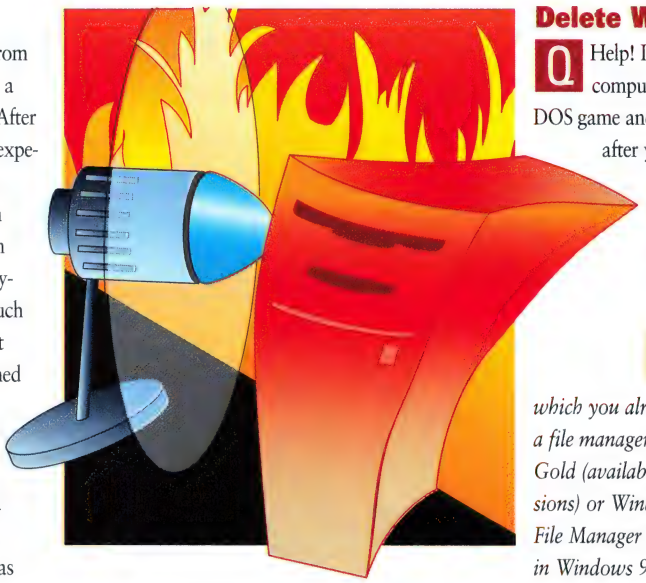
*Overheated chips, choppy sound, and getting rid of unwanted directories.*

**By Patrick Marshall**

## Beat the Heat

**Q** I just recently upgraded my computer from a 486DX4/100 with 16MB of RAM to a screaming Pentium 166 with 32MB of RAM. After the first hour or so of running Windows 95, I experienced my first general protection fault. After that, I started getting GPFs, fatal errors, system lock-ups, and a few other things I've never seen before. For the next couple of weeks I did everything I could think of without spending too much money. One day, I took the cover off to look at something and I noticed that the machine seemed hotter than normal. I took a fan and pointed it right into the computer. My system started working like it was supposed to. That was about a week or so ago. My new motherboard came with a little cooling fan for my processor chip, but obviously it wasn't up to the job. I was wondering if there are better types of fans or extra fans I can get for my system? I would like to be able to put the cover back on my computer one day.

**Anthony Fraley**
**Via the Internet**



**A** *The Pentium processor definitely runs hotter than 386 or 486 processors, which is why it is delivered with a heat sink and/or mini-fan installed right on top of the chip. What's more, the chips and circuits on peripheral cards and hard drives can also generate lots of heat. Additional RAM and cache memory will push the mercury up even further. Cram too many fully loaded cards and drives into a box and you could find the system shutting down, especially during hot and muggy weather.*

*Unfortunately, there are no clear rules for how many fans your system may need. How the air flows inside the computer depends upon the specific design of the internal components. Generally, you'll find that most tower boxes designed for Pentium systems have at least two fans in addition to the little one sitting on top of the processor: One can usually be found at the bottom front of the computer, and the other in the power supply at the top rear of the box. If your current box has only a single fan, check out the possibility of getting a new box with two fans.*

## Diagnosing Sound Troubles

**Q** I've been having a problem with my sound card. Whenever I load a game like Warcraft II or Virtua Fighter I get very choppy noise from my speakers. But when I run the games in DOS, there are no problems. What's causing this?

**Tomasz Finc**
**Via the Internet**

**A** *There can be quite a few different causes of this problem. Here are the most likely: First, something may be causing the transfer of data from your CD drive to run abnormally slowly. The two most likely reasons for this are that you don't have enough available RAM in your system or that there is some TSR (terminate-and-stay-resident) program that is interfering. If your RAM is 8MB or less, low memory could well be your problem, depending upon what applications and drivers you have loaded. To check for either, try loading Windows without any other applications running. If you're using Windows 3.x, remark out the LOAD= and RUN= lines in your WIN.INI file (type a semi-colon at the beginning of each line to remark them out) and see if the problem persists.*

*If you're using Windows 95, clear your StartUp folder to make sure nothing is loading when you boot Windows. Assuming everything above checks out OK, the cause of your problem is likely to be the DMA (direct memory access) setting for your sound card. In Windows 95 you can try alternate DMA settings by calling up the Device Manager, selecting the sound card, and then clicking on the Properties button. Then click on the Resources tab. Select a different DMA setting and check the Conflict Information box to see if the current setting conflicts with any other devices.*

## Delete With Extreme Prejudice

**Q** Help! I am very, very new to using a personal computer. Is there an easy way to delete a DOS game and its directory from your hard drive after you are done playing it? I need the space. Please quit laughing and help me out.

**Mike**
**Via the Internet**

**A** *No laughs here. The only silly questions are ones to which you already know the answers. If you have a file manager program, such as Symantec's XTree Gold (available in both DOS and Windows versions) or Windows' own file manager (known as File Manager in Windows 3.x and as Explorer in Windows 95), the job is easy. Simply highlight the directory you want to delete and press the Delete key.*

*If you aren't running Windows and don't want to spend extra for a separate file manager, you can do the job either using commands at the DOS command line or by loading the DOS Shell. Load the DOS Shell by typing "dosshell" at the Program Manager command line. The main difference between the way the DOS Shell works and the way other file managers work is that with the former you must first delete all the files in a directory before you can delete the directory. Thus, you must highlight all the files in the game directory, then press the Delete key. Only then can you highlight the directory itself and press the Delete key.*

*At the command line, you can delete an entire directory, along with any subdirectories, without first deleting all the files. Just type DELTREE XXXX, substituting the directory name for the Xs, of course. This is, by the way, a feature new to DOS 6.0 and up. If you're using an earlier version, you'll have to first delete all the files in the directory, and then type RD \XXXX.*

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# FACE-OFF

**Rob Smith** *Daniel Morris*

# Ride the Rails?

Deadly Tide

Rebel Assault II

Computer games take us from the humdrum reality of everyday life to meet the inhabitants of strange and wonderful new worlds—and then kill them. No game gets this done more efficiently or satisfyingly than a railed shooter, or so some say.

Senior Reviews Editor Rob "Rubbish!" Smith isn't one of them. If it were up to him, the genre would be flushed posthaste. But there is still a strong appeal to these scripted shoot-'em-ups that hasn't faded for a more existential staffer, Assistant Editor Daniel "Life is Just a Railed Shooter" Morris. The firing commences, with Rob's rantings in **bold** type and Dan's in the classy *italics*...

Rebel Assault II

**What can computer games do for people? Put them at the forefront of stories spanning the universe, in the shoes of heroic types who brave worlds full of monsters with nothing but a trusty pistol for company. Railed shooters are supposed to do all this, but they leave out the most entertaining facets of play—controlling movement and travel, conducting diplomacy, and planning strategies (either real-time or slow, plodding, turn-based; but that's another argument). Railed shooters are worthless because you're not in control. I want to call the shots, not be along for the ride. I want to be Maverick, not Goose!**

*Whoa there, big daddy. Can we not accept railed shooters for what they are—simple, mindless entertainment? Sometimes, after a long night of wargaming or civilization-building, it's a simple joy to boot up a railed shooter and blast the living hell out of something. Modern life is a stressful thing, and we need to unwind with nice, uncomplicated violence. You spend all day working in some thankless office, and when you go home, you want something simple and violent to unwind with.*

**Doesn't Quake do just that, but with you at the helm? And stressful office?! You play computer games all day long!**

*Exactly. Just imagine how hell-bent for destruction everyone else is—they have to work real jobs!*

**But where's the entertainment in a game that can be played with your chin resting in one hand while the other clicks a mouse along a preordained path? The only worthwhile railed shooters were the Rebel Assaults, and then only because of the *Star Wars* setting. X-Wing and TIE Fighter—now *those* were games, where you were actually in charge of your own destiny.**

*Hey, I'm all for destiny. But have you ever heard the saying, "The more complex the mind, the greater the need for simplicity of play"? I worry about every damn thing in the world—nukes, Ebola, Republicans, cops searching my apartment—but sometimes it's nice to have somebody else plot my steps as I pull the trigger over and over. It's cathartic. It's reassuring. It confirms my place in a chaotic and shifting universe. It's—dare I say it—therapeutic.*

**Rubbish! PC games allow you to do so much more than that, so why spend your money on something so limited? Gaming demands involvement, which is minuscule in railed shooting.**

*Well, I guess if you even have to ask, you'll never know. Railed shooters are the cheapest psychoanalysis there is—no questions asked. At 40 bucks a game (versus 40 bucks an hour on a couch), you just can't beat the price.*

---

Rob Smith's most hated railed shooters include Chaos Control, The Hive, and Deadly Tide. For a man who dislikes the genre so much, he sure does have a large number of toy guns in his office.

Daniel Morris' favorite railed shooters include Virtua Squad, The Hive, and Deadly Tide. He used to shoot scarecrows with shotguns in front of his house, but the Monterey County Sheriff made him stop.

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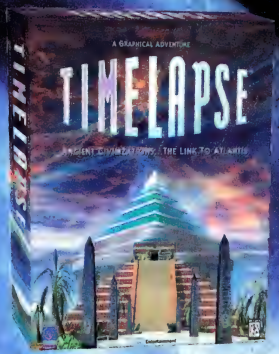


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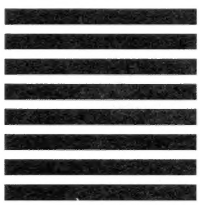

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